

S E R M O N S

O N T H E

6. 28. 4

Following Subjects,

V I Z.

Of the universal sense of good and evil.

The characters of the righteous and good man compared; or benevolence the noblest branch of social virtue.

The perfection of the Christian scheme of benevolence; in answer to the objection from its not having particularly recommended private friendship, and the love of our country.

Of the image of God in man; or the excellency of human nature.

God not an arbitrary being.

Of the abuses of free-thinking.

Of Mysteries.

Agur's prayer; or the middle condition of life, generally, the most eligible.

The mischiefs of slavish complaisance, and cowardice.

Rules for the profitable reading the Holy Scriptures.

Of Heresy.

Of Schism.

Of the pleasures of a religious life.

Religion founded on reason, and the right of private judgment.

The evidence of a future state, or the principles of reason and revelation, distinctly consider'd.

The nature, folly, and danger of scoffing at religion.

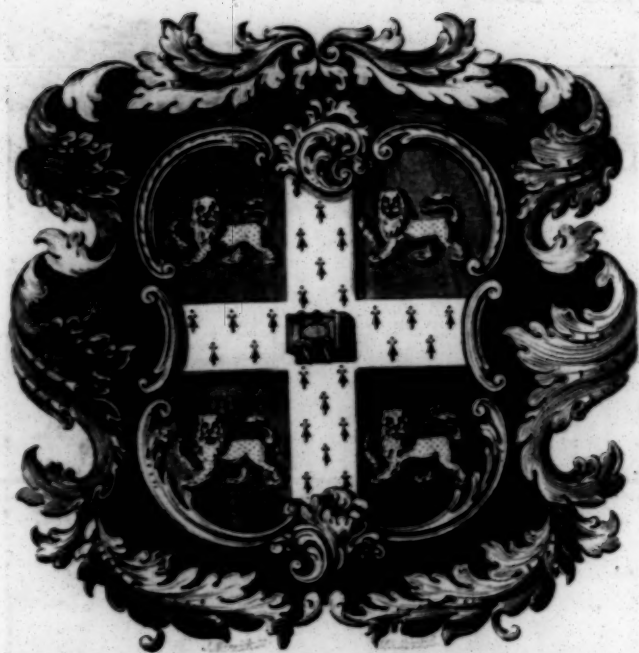
By JAMES FOSTER.

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CONTENTS.



SERMON I. Of the universal sense of good and evil.

ACTS xxiv. 25.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled. Page 1

SERM. II. The characters of the righteous and good man compared; or benevolence the noblest improvement of social virtue.

ROM. v. 7.

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die. 23

SERM. III. The perfection of the Christian scheme of benevolence; in answer to the objection from its not having particularly recommended private friendship, and the love of our country.

ROM. v. 7.

For scarcely for a righteous man will one
A 2 *die,*

C O N T E N T S.

*die, yet, peradventure, for a good man
some would even dare to die.* Page 49

SERM. IV. Of the image of God in man;
or the excellency of human nature.

GEN. i. 27.

*So God created man in his own image, in
the image of God created he him.* 77

SERM. V. God not an arbitrary being.

ROM. ix. 20.

*Nay, but, O man, who art thou that re-
pliest against God?* 101

SERM. VI. Of the abuses of free-thinking.

GAL. v. 13.

*For, brethren, ye have been called unto
liberty, only use not liberty for an oc-
casion to the flesh.* 127

SERM. VII. Of Mysteries.

DEUT. xxix. 29.

*The secret things belong unto the LORD
our God; but those things which are re-
veal'd belong unto us, and to our chil-
dren for ever, that we may do all the
words of this law.* 159

SERM. VIII. Agur's prayer, or the mid-
dle condition of life, generally, the
most eligible.

PROV.

C O N T E N T S.

PROV. xxx. Part of the 8th, and the whole 9th verse.

—*Give me neither poverty, nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me : lest I be full and deny thee, and say who is the LORD ? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.* Page 185

SERM. IX. The mischiefs of slavish complaisance and cowardice.

PROV. xxix. 25.

The fear of man bringeth a snare. 215

SERM. X. Rules for the profitable reading the Holy Scriptures.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the scriptures — 241

SERM. XI. Of Heresy.

TITUS iii. 10, 11.

A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject ; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself. 269

SERM. XII. Of Schism.

1 COR. xii. 25.

That there should be no Schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. 295

SERM. XIII. Of the pleasures of a religious life.

PROV.

C O N T E N T S.

PROV. iii. 17.

*Her ways are ways of pleasantness ; and
all her paths are peace.* Page 321

SERM. XIV. Religion founded on reason,
and the right of private judgment.

JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the
LORD, choose ye this day whom ye will
serve, whether the Gods which your fa-
thers served that were on the other side
of the flood, or the Gods of the Amorites,
in whose land ye dwell : But as for me,
and my house, we will serve the
LORD.* 345

SERM. XV. The evidence of a future
state, on the principles of reason and
revelation, distinctly considered.

2 TIM. i. 10.

*—Who hath abolished death, and hath
brought life and immortality to light
through the Gospel.* 373

SERM. XVI. The nature, folly, and dan-
ger of scoffing at religion.

2 PET. iii. 3.

*Knowing this first, that there shall come
in the last days scoffers, walking after
their own lusts.* 401

S E R M O N



S E R M O N I.

Of the universal sense of good and evil.

ACTS xxiv. 25.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.—



H E R E is nothing more use-^{S E R M.}
ful and instructive than to ^{I.}
acquaint ourselves with the
history of mankind, especially
in their moral conduct: This gives us a
true knowledge of human nature, of the
various workings of its passions, and the
principles by which it is influenced. And
observations grounded on *fact* are certain

SERM. and indisputable ; whereas *abstract specu-*

I. *lations* may not only differ very much, but are liable to be disputed, and more easily perplexed or evaded. Besides, a small piece of history affords a greater variety of incidents for the improvement of our minds, and the right conduct of life, than can be suggested, within the same compass, in the way of *instruction* and *reasoning* : This will more fully appear by considering the particular transaction between *Paul* and *Felix*, of which the text is a part.

Felix *, by the confession of *Tacitus* the Roman historian, governed the *Jews* in a very arbitrary manner, and committed the grossest acts of *oppression* and *tyranny*. And *Drusilla* his wife, without any good reason to justify a divorce, had left her former husband, and given herself to him ; and consequently was an *adulteress* : When *St. Paul*, therefore, was sent for

Joseph.
Ant. l. xx.
c. 5.

* Claudius defunctis regibus, Judæam provinciam equitibus Romanis aut libertis permisit ; è quibus Antonius Felix, per omnem sævitiam ac libidinem, jus regium servili ingenio exercuit. *Histor. lib. v. c. 9.*

At non frater ejus cognomento *Felix* pari moderatione agebat, jam pridem Judææ impositus, & cuncta malefacta sibi impune ratus, tanta potentia subnixo. *Annal. xii. 54.*

to

to explain to them the nature of the SERM.
 Christian Religion, which was then new- I.
 ly published, and, upon that account, a
 matter of *curiosity*; and in discoursing
 on the morality of the gospel, which is
 the most important and essential part of
 it (as it must be of every revelation that
 is really of divine original) took occasion
 to inculcate the eternal laws of justice,
 and the immutable obligations of tem-
 perance and chastity; the conscience of
 the governour was alarmed and terrified,
 and a sense of his crime, and dread of
 the righteous and awful judgment of
 God upon all such notorious offenders
 against the rules of *righteousness* and *hu-*
manity, filled him with the utmost con-
 fusion. *Drusilla* indeed does not appear
 to have discovered any remorse; perhaps
 she was, naturally, of a more hard, insen-
 sible, unrelenting temper; or confided in
 her *Jewish* priviledges, and expected to
 be saved, as a daughter of *Abraham*, not-
 withstanding the immorality and wick-
 edness of her life. However this be, as
 'tis not my business to make conjectures,
 I shall proceed to consider what is direct-
 ly related by the historian, *viz.* that, as
 Paul

SERM. Paul *reasoned of righteousness, temperance,*

I. *and judgment to come, Felix trembled;*
 only premising, that the impression, which the Apostle's discourse made upon his mind, did not spring from any thing in his *peculiar* circumstances, but from the *general frame* of human nature, and principles that are common to all mankind; and consequently that the moral reflections, naturally arising from it, must be of *universal* concern. And,

1st. We learn from this history, that there is, even in the worst of men, a *natural conscience* of good and evil, which in very few, if any, instances, is intirely extinguished. It may be darkned, perverted, and very much defaced, but is hardly ever quite obliterated and lost. There are certain seasons, which check the insolence of the passions, and dispose for gravity and consideration, in which it *revives*; and represents the malignity of irregular and vitious excesses in a clear and strong light.

Indeed the advocates for vice and licentiousness have, some times, gone so far, as to represent all our notions of
 right

right and wrong as the effects of *education*, SERM.
custom, *superstition*, and the like; but this I.
 evidently shews, that they are men of very 
 little knowledge of human nature; and
 of narrow observation: For let them
 fix on any instance of real and un-
 doubted superstition they please, and let
 them examine all ages, and histories;
 and they will never find, tho' it was
 ever so plausible, and managed with the
 utmost art and dexterity, that it had
 such a *steady* and *universal* influence as
 notions of morality. The *weak* and *un-*
thinking, and persons of a *suspicious*, *gloomy*
 temper, may be persuaded to look upon
 it as sacred, and drawn into a stiff attach-
 ment to it; but the more *judicious* have
 secretly despis'd it; and it was never known
 to take, universally, as a thing of real ex-
 cellency and importance in itself, with men
 of all *capacities*, *inclinations* and *interests*.

Again, by the use of proper argu-
 ments, a man may convince great mul-
 titudes of the absurdity and folly of
 any *established superstition*, and form a
 strong party against it; but let him use
 the utmost sophistry to confound all
 dis-

SERM. distinction between *virtue* and *vice*, t^o

I. prove that there is no difference between
 just and unjust, beneficence and cruelty,
 that fraud and oppression, adultery and
 murder, have nothing criminal in them,
 but what is owing to the *arbitrary* de-
 termination of the world, or the juggles
 of *priests* and *politicians*; let him attempt,
 I say, to establish so monstrous a scheme
 with ever so much craft and subtilty
 he will make but few profelytes; nay,
 nor even be able to impose on himself
 so far, however he may perplex and
 puzzle his understanding, as to be firmly
 established in such a wild opinion, with-
 out having, at any time, *uneasy suspicions*,
 and some mixtures of *jealousy* and *distrust*.

Add to this, that the *wisest*, in all
 ages, those who have discovered the
 greatest strength and compass of rea-
 son, have had the most large and re-
 fined sentiments of morality, and urged
 the strictest regard to it in all its parts.
 And finally, that those who differed most
 about external rites, and particular forms
 of superstition, have *unanimously* agreed
 in asserting the sacredness of moral obli-
 gations,

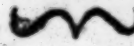
gations, and in all the essential and mo-
mentous branches of virtue. All which,
taken together, is the strongest presump-
tion imaginable, that the universal sense
of good and evil, which appears among
mankind, is a *natural* principle; and has
not its foundation in *fancy* and *enthu-*
siasm.

But to come more directly to the
point. All the obligations of morality
approve themselves, upon examination, to
our best and purest reason: And this
single circumstance proves, undeniably,
that they spring from the nature of
things; that whereas it holds true of all
kinds of superstition, that they will not
stand an exact and critical enquiry, are
best liked when they are least understood,
most successfully propagated in times of
ignorance and implicit faith, and lose
ground in more judicious and inquisi-
tive ages; the quite contrary may be said
of the rules of virtue, which, the more
narrowly they are canvassed, their au-
thority appears by so much the more
unquestionable: The mind, the more it
considers and argues about them, is the
more

SERM.
I.
~~~~~



SERM. more fully convinced of their importance:

I.  Nothing does the cause of virtue so much service, or makes it appear with such dignity and lustre, as bringing it to the test of *a good understanding*: as an evidence of which, it has, in fact, been always most cultivated, and held in highest esteem, in the most *knowing* and *civilized* nations, where those ingenuous and liberal arts, which adorn and polish human life, have flourished in their greatest perfection.

But even this is not all. For because the decisions of reason are *slow*, formed by a train of deductions and inferences; which all are not equally capable of; and if notions of morality were only to be acquired this way, the good effect would too frequently be obstructed by various causes, preventing the right exercise of our rational faculties, in some by *the cares of Life*, in others by *indolence*; upon these accounts, I say, there seems to be implanted in our nature a kind of *sense* of good and evil, an *immediate perception*, without any intervening train of reasoning, of the amiableness and beauty  
of

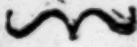
of virtue, and the deformity of vice. SERM.  
And this I take to be what is most properly meant by *natural conscience*; which I.   
however it may be corrupted and obscured by sensual passions, and, for a time, controuled by strong prejudices, and inveterate habits of vice, the worst of men can't entirely get rid of. And, undoubtedly, it is an excellent provision of the God of nature, and an undeniable proof of his wisdom and goodness in the formation of mankind; not only as 'tis a constant incentive to honourable, virtuous, and useful actions, and a more *expeditious, universal, and vigorous* principle than the mere cool and abstract dictates of reason; but as it may always be a means of reforming offenders, and does not leave their recovery *quite desperate*, tho' they have gone great lengths in vice and disorder; or, at least, in many cases, checks the irregular excesses of their passions, and *limits* their extravagancies, which might, otherwise, occasion greater confusion in the world, and be much more injurious to the general interests of societies.

SERM. I shall only add, that as it appears, from

**L** the example in the text, that bad men  
 are sometimes struck with terror on account of their vices, and fully convinced of their unreasonable nature, and pernicious consequences, but soon wear off the impression, and continue their evil practices without being at all reformed; we learn from hence, how strangely a course of habitual wickedness *captivates* and *enslaves* the mind: It is held in such strong fetters, that the sinner has not resolution enough to return to the paths of virtue, tho' reason and interest both demand it; nor to abandon his vices, notwithstanding he is persuaded that they are a source of reproach and dishonour, and have a direct tendency to misery and ruin. Such a state of servitude, in which our *noblest* faculties, our *intellectual* and *moral* powers, are entirely subjected to sense and appetite, is the lowest and most melancholy depravation of human nature; most *ignominious* in itself, and *fatal* in its effects.

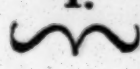
2dly. We may observe, from the text, what a miserable thing it is to have a  
 con-



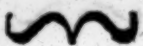
conscience burthened with guilt, in that SERM.  
a man dares not trust himself *to think*, for I.  
fear of being alarmed, and filled with   
terror and confusion. *Felix* does not  
seem to have been at all prone to super-  
stition; or, in general, to have had any  
troublesome sense of his crimes. The  
flatteries of a court, and the amuse-  
ments of grandeur and luxury, gave him  
no time to cool; and diverted all grave  
and serious reflections. But when St.  
*Paul* began to discourse to him of the  
immutable obligations of justice, against  
which he had been a most heinous offen-  
der, he immediately saw the vileness of  
his conduct, and *trembled* for the conse-  
quences of it.

And the case is very much the same  
with such as indulge to any other kind  
of vicious excess. As long as they are a-  
mus'd with company, or engag'd in a  
hurry of business, or can keep their pas-  
sions inflam'd, and silence the voice of  
reason and natural conscience by a course  
of intemperance, they may continue *stupid*  
and *insensible*. But when any thing hap-  
pens that damps their gaiety, gives a  
shock to the mind, and puts them up-

SERM. on thinking, they are soon rows'd out of

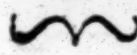
I.  their *lethargy*, and entertain'd with none but *dark* and *gloomy* prospects. And nothing, surely, can be a more perverted state of mankind, than to derive all their relief, all their peace, from the *suppression* or *extinction* of reason; not to be able to stand the deliberate judgment of their own minds, or bear those exercises of sedate and impartial reflection, which are their peculiar glory and happiness. Besides, as guilt is such an enemy to *consideration*, there is this dreadful circumstance attending it farther to aggravate and enhance its misery, that it cuts off, in a great measure, *the only possible means* of the sinners recovery.

3dly. It is a very natural inference from the text, that inculcating the great duties of morality, and enforcing the practice of them from a regard to the future judgment, is true *Gospel preaching*; and answers, in the most effectual manner, the excellent design of Christianity. Indeed the reason of the thing itself demonstrates, that to promote universal purity, and strengthen the obligations of virtue, which are eternal and immutable, a conformity

formity to the moral perfections of God, SERM.  
 and the supreme rectitude and happiness I.  
 of human nature, must be the ultimate   
 view of every divine revelation. Without this, *faith* is no better than *infidelity*,  
 nor *orthodoxy* than *error*; and external  
 rites and solemnities of devotion, however dignified by *civil* or *ecclesiastical*  
 authority, or even by a *divine* appointment, if they are consider'd as having an  
 intrinsic goodness, and substituted in the room of the virtues of a holy life, are so  
 far from being parts of *true religion*, that they degenerate into acts of the most  
 vile and impious *superstition*. And therefore if Christianity had, really, subverted,  
 in any instance, the religion of nature, or depreiated any essential branches of morality;  
 nay, indeed, if it had not represented them as of the first importance to mankind,  
 infinitely preferable to *speculations*, *mysteries*, and alterable *forms* and *modes*  
 of worship; notwithstanding the *pomp* of miracles, it would hardly have prov'd  
 itself, to a wise and judicious inquirer, worthy of God, or useful to the world.



SERM. TO PREACH CHRIST is uni-

I.  universally allowed to be the duty of every Christian minister. But what doth it mean? — 'Tis not to use his name as a charm, to work up our hearers to a warm pitch of *enthusiasm*, without any foundation of reason to support it. — 'Tis not to make his person and his offices incomprehensible. — 'Tis not to exalt *his* glory, as a kind condescending favour, to the dishonour of the supreme and unlimited goodness of the *creator* and *father* of the universe; who is represented as stern and inexorable, expressing no indulgence to his guilty creatures, but demanding full and rigorous satisfaction for their offences. — 'Tis not to encourage *undue* and *presumptuous* reliances on his merits and intercession, to the contempt of virtue and good works. No: But to represent him as a *law-giver* as well as a saviour, as a *preacher of righteousness*, as one who hath given us a most noble and complete system of morals, enforced by the most substantial and worthy motives; and to shew, that the whole scheme of our redemption is *a doctrine according to godliness*.

That

That this is *preaching Christ* is evident, beyond all reasonable dispute, from the text, and the verse immediately preceding, where we are told, that Felix *sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith of Christ; and as, i. e. in explaining the faith, or doctrine, of Christ, he reason'd of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.* And this method bears the nearest conformity to our Saviour's own example, whose whole sermon on the mount, the longest he ever preach'd, is entirely taken up in recommending *moral* duties; and the drift of, almost, all his parable is either to inculcate, in general, honesty and integrity of mind, or urge the practice of particular virtues, or discountenance and restrain prevailing and destructive vices. The sum of our duty, in the opinion of this divine instructor, consists in *the love of God, and of our neighbour; and according to St. James, pure religion and undefil'd, before God, even the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.* So that all those who decry moral virtue, which is the

SERM.  
I.  
~

SERM. supreme dignity of God himself, and  
 I. inseparably connected with the happiness  
 of all rational beings, as a thing of no  
 avail towards obtaining the divine favour, and the privileges and rewards of christianity, do, *in effect*, (tho', I am persuaded, with a quite different design, even to exalt, instead of diminishing, the honour of the gospel) subvert the very fundamental principles both of natural and reveal'd religion.

And from what has been said it appears, that to explain and press the eternal laws of morality is not only a truly Christian, but, beyond comparison, the most *useful* method of preaching. In this I include enforcing the rules of virtue by all the *peculiar* motives which the Christian religion suggests; and making all its doctrines subservient to holiness. There is a passage, in St. Paul's epistle to *Titus*, very particular, and strong to this purpose; *this is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believ'd in God might be careful to maintain good works; these things are good and profitable to men. They are of invariable importance; of*  
*universal*



*universal* advantage; and tend to ad-  
vance the highest interests of human na-  
ture in all ages, nations, and circum-  
stances; and under every possible deno-  
mination and form of true religion. To  
cultivate in the minds of men a supreme  
reverence and love of God, and promote  
the mutual exercise of strict impartial  
justice, generous and extensive benevo-  
lence, meekness and condescension, peace-  
ableness and humility, and a strict regard  
to all the rules of chastity and tempe-  
rance, is to make them most amiable in  
themselves, useful to society, and the fa-  
vourites of heaven.

But of what advantage is it to set  
faith and reason at variance, and lay  
more stress on *believing right*, which is a  
qualification the most profligate and a-  
bandon'd may attain to (nay even *the  
devils believe and tremble*) than on puri-  
ty of heart, and righteousness of life?—  
Of what advantage is it to magnify the  
*grace* of God, by disparaging and vili-  
fying human nature, which is the *work*  
of God; by representing mankind as  
having lost their noble powers of reason  
and liberty, and, consequently, being al-

SERM. together as incapable of religion as the

I. brute creatures? — What *end* does it answer to wrap religion up in *darkness*, and lay a great stress on the *incomprehensible subtleties* of *school-divinity*, but to confound weak understandings, make the ignorant conceited and censorious, and foment a spirit of uncharitableness and party-zeal? — What is the *use* of insisting on absolute and irreversible decrees, but to encourage *presumption*, or drive to *despair*? — Or in fixing the whole of our salvation on the righteousness of another imputed to us, and giving a despicable representation of the most exalted human virtues, unless it be to mortify the *best* of men, and slacken their diligence and zeal, and flatter the very *worst* in their vices?

I may add to what has been already said, that not only the recommending and inculcating, but *reasoning* about points of morality is of singular advantage, and the very best way to propagate the knowledge and practice of Christianity. Of this we have a plain example in the conduct of St. *Paul*, who is describ'd, in the text, as *reasoning*, with  
*Felix,*

*Felix, of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.* And, indeed, the more of *reason* there appears in our religion, the brighter are the internal characters of its divine original. Men will be the more strongly dispos'd to obey it, when they are convinc'd that 'tis not impos'd by a mere *arbitrary* authority, but is excellent in itself, and conducive to their happiness. Besides, by this method we shall represent our duty in a greater variety of lights, to strike every passion, and suit it to all tempers and circumstances. So that whatever will not stand the test of free argument and inquiry can't be the religion of reasonable beings, nor proceed from a wise and beneficent governour; but is fit only for a TYRANT to enjoin, and SLAVES to submit to.

4. A sense of guilt makes those things the objects of *aversion* and *horror*, which, naturally, yield the highest delight and satisfaction. We have an instance, in the text, of one that was shock'd at the strict obligations of *justice*, without which there can be no pleasure, or convenience in human life, and the whole frame of civil societies



SERM. societies must, immediately, be dissolv'd.

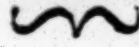
I. It mortifies the epicure and the adulterer  
 to be told of the rules of *temperance* and *chastity*, which are absolutely necessary to the health of our bodies, the rectitude and vigour of our minds, and the grand security of what is most dear and sacred to us; and the cruel and revengeful to hear of *gentleness*, *beneficence*, and the soft impressions of *humanity*, tho' they form the most excellent and amiable character we can possibly conceive of. Could we find a being, *originally*, form'd with such apprehensions of things, we should look upon it with detestation, and universally abhor the author of such a vile production. But yet our passions and prejudices so strangely deceive us, that we think more favourably of the pursuits of vice, which create many such MONSTERS; who would be glad to prove that the distinctions of good and evil were *fantastic* and *arbitrary*, and virtue and vice *mere empty names*; and, thereby, destroy the order and beauty of the whole moral creation of God.

In like manner, the future judgment of mankind is, in itself, far from being  
 an

an object of *terror*. For that we are SERM.  
 moral accountable creatures is owing to I.  
 our superior capacities, which are the  
 distinguishing honour and dignity of our  
 nature; and nothing can be a more  
 comfortable reflection to a well-dispos'd  
 mind, than that its integrity will be  
 tried and rewarded by a being of uner-  
 ring wisdom, inflexible justice, and un-  
 limited goodness. But, to a guilty sin-  
 ner, this is so tremendous a scene, that  
 the mere prospect of it fills him with a-  
 gony and confusion. He does not con-  
 sider it as *honourable* to human nature,  
 because it threatens his vices; can't think  
 of abiding by the sentence of *unchange-  
 able rectitude*, and *infinite benevolence* it-  
 self; and the sum of his wishes is *to die  
 like a brute*. The future judgment is not  
 reveal'd with a view to *alarm* and *con-  
 found* the mind, but to restrain those  
 irregular practices, which are the surest  
 ground of melancholy suspicions, and  
 inward horror.

Let men, therefore, but abandon their  
 vices, their impiety and injustice, re-  
 venge and cruelty, sensuality and intem-  
 perance, and endeavour to resemble God  
 in

SER M. in purity, righteousness, and beneficence,

I.  and then they may always think of him with pleasure, as the compassionate father, the righteous and merciful governor of mankind, who delights in the happiness of his children and subjects: Nay, they may even expect, with joy, the time when they shall appear before his impartial tribunal, when justice will be temper'd with clemency, and all reasonable allowances made both for particular circumstances, and for the general weakness and frailty of human nature; and when *the judge of all the earth*, who must of necessity *do right*, shall render *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil, but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good.*----God grant that we may all *have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

Rom. ii.  
8, 9, 10.







## S E R M O N II.

The characters of the righteous and good man compared; or benevolence the noblest improvement of social virtue.

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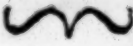
ROM. v. 7.

*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die.*



IN the verse preceding the text, SERM. II.  
the Apostle mentions that great instance of the love of God, in sending his son into the world to die for us, which is the peculiar discovery of the gospel, and deserves our highest admiration and gratitude;

SERM. tude; for when we were yet without

II. *Strength, in due time Christ died for the*  
 *ungodly.* The goodness of God, in this

wonderful constitution, is celebrated, in the new Testament, with the most lofty encomiums. There is an uncommon stress

John iii. and emphasis laid upon it; *God so lov'd*  
 16. *the world, &c. and herein is love, that he*  
 1 John iv. *gave his son to be the propitiation for our*  
 10. *sins.* It vastly surpasses the most noble

and heroic instances of human benevolence and friendship. For, amongst men, there is scarce one to be met with, that will die for a person who is strictly *just* and *righteous*; and 'tis very rare and extraordinary to find any that will lay down their lives even for a *charitable beneficent* man, *peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die; but God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* This is the immediate connection of the words, which I shall consider, in what follows, as an independent proposition: And grounding my discourse entirely on the observation St. *Paul* has made, that mankind have a much greater esteem of kind

and

and generous than of merely just actions, SERM.  
shall endeavour to shew, that this is not **II.**  
owing to *education*, *fancy*, and *enthusiasm*,  
but founded on *right reason*, and a true  
judgment of the intrinsic nature and dif-  
ferences of things. In order to this, I  
shall,

- I. Give a short sketch of the charac-  
ters of the *righteous* and *good* man.
- II. Shew the vastly superior excellen-  
cy of the latter. And
- III. Make some useful observations on  
the whole.

1<sup>st</sup>. I am to give a short sketch of the  
characters of the *righteous* and *good* man.  
There is a general view in which right-  
teousness and goodness have exactly the  
same signification, and denote the prac-  
tice of every thing that is essentially right  
and good. And as, in this large and  
extensive sense, they both comprehend all  
moral virtues, goodness, or benevolence,  
must be included in righteousness, as  
justice is included in goodness even in its  
most restrain'd sense. But, besides this,  
the



SER M. the words have a more limited meaning.

II. In the Scriptures, and in all other writings, righteousness frequently signifies the particular virtue of justice; and it would be easy to shew likewise, that goodness, in very many passages of the new Testament, is the same with kindness, generosity, and charity. I shall mention but two which are indisputable; *is thine eye evil because I am good?* and again, *be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.* And there can be no doubt whether we must understand St. Paul thus, when he speaks, in the text, of the *righteous* and *good* man, because they are distinguish'd from each other.

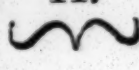
Mat. xx.

15.

Rom. xii.

21.

But it may be asked, can a man, in any sense, be strictly just that is not good? — Are not his good offices *due* to his fellow creatures? I answer, that those who are in distress have, unquestionably, a *right* to be reliev'd, founded on reason, on common ties of humanity, and the mutual dependence of mankind upon one another. This right, however, is only *general*. It does not, in most cases, give them a claim to assistance and support from any particular persons;

persons; but men are at liberty to chuse SERM.  
the objects towards whom to exercise their II.  
charity, as their own judgment and pru-   
dence directs, and he that is neglected  
may have no reason to complain of a real  
injury done him. Whereas justice is an  
*immediate* demand that one man has up-  
on another. 'Tis a demand of something  
*fix'd* and *certain*, which is not the case in  
acts of charity, the fitness of which, with  
respect to particular persons, and conse-  
quently our claims from them, depend  
on a variety of circumstances that can't  
always be adjusted, and very often, per-  
haps, are not proper to be known. So  
that tho' he who has it in his power to  
do many services for his fellow-creatures,  
which his circumstances and station in  
life plainly direct to, but neglects to per-  
form them, either thro' indolence, or an  
hard unrelenting insensible temper; tho'  
such a one, I say, may in a more gene-  
ral sense be said to be *unjust*, because he  
does not that good which the necessi-  
ties of others call for, and which may  
fairly be expected from him; yet it ap-  
pears, from what has been said, that

C

there

28      *The characters of the righteous*

SERM. there is some ground for the distinction  
 II. made, in the text, between the *righteous*  
 and *good* man, and we shall be able the  
 more easily to delineate their respective  
 characters.

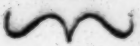
The *just* man, then, punctually answers all the particular demands that can be made upon him, and renders unto every man what he can exactly and precisely prove to be his due; not upon a *general* right of claim in which others are equally concern'd, but due *immediately* from himself. He is fair and honest in his dealings, true to his promises, nor does any man a direct injury. He will neither defame and blacken his reputation, nor oppress him by open violence, nor circumvent and deceive him by secret fraud. He will not abuse the confidence that is reposed in him, nor take advantage of his neighbour's ignorance to do him a prejudice. And as he is careful to do to others every thing that, in *strict equity*, he is obliged to do, he *rigorously* insists on his due from them; and if he can't be charg'd with *down-right injustice*, imagines that this is all that  
 can



can be expected from him, and concerns SERM.  
himself about nothing farther. I have II.  
stated the matter thus, because if I should  
suppose him to recede from his strict  
right, and make favourable abatements  
and allowances, it would confound his  
character with that of the beneficent or  
generous man, from which, the apostle's  
argument, in the text, requires it should  
be kept entirely distinct.

But now the *good* man goes far beyond this. He makes the interest of mankind, in a manner, his own, and has a tender and affectionate concern for their welfare. He can't think himself happy, whatever his possessions and enjoyments are, while he sees others miserable. His wealth and affluence delight him chiefly as the poor and indigent are the better for it; and the greatest charm of prosperity is the opportunity it affords of relieving his fellow creatures, and being more extensively useful. He thinks he has discharg'd but *the least part* of his duty, when he has done strict justice to all; and therefore the communicating advice and comfort, assistance and support, according to the various

SERM. rious exigencies of those with whom he

II.  converses, is his constant endeavour, and most pleasing entertainment. In the strong and elegant language of *Job*, he is *eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame*, Job. xxix. 12, 13, 15. *he delivereth the poor that cry, and the fatherless, and him that hath none to help him; the blessing of him that is ready to perish cometh upon him, and he causeth the widows heart to sing for joy.* And that he may practice the more large and generous charity, he retrenches useles pomp and extravagance, and by a regular and prudent management, constantly provides for the relief of the necessitous; esteeming this a much more sublime and noble gratification, than the idle amusements and gallantries of a vain and luxurious age. Ps. cxii. 5 *A good man, saith the Psalmist, sheweth favour and lendeth; he will guide his affairs with discretion.*

Again, he not only takes all occasions, that present themselves, of doing good, but seeks for opportunities to be useful; 'tis part of the stated employment and business of his life. He contrives and studies which way he may be most serviceable

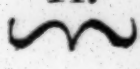
viceable to his fellow-creatures, and what SERM.  
that particular talent is, with which II.  
he is entrusted for the good of man-  
kind. If it be *power*, he protects and  
encourages virtue by his authority and  
influence, is the patron of liberty, and  
vindicates the cause of oppress'd inno-  
cence: if *riches*, he is *rich in good works*, 1 Tim. vi.  
*ready to distribute, willing to communicate:* 18.  
if *knowledge*, he counts it his highest  
pleasure to instruct the ignorant, and  
administer proper direction and comfort  
in perplexing and difficult circumstan-  
ces, and to defend the cause of religion,  
and represent it in a just and amiable  
light. And to nothing of this does he  
want to be *solicited*, but his generous  
heart is always ready, and strongly dis-  
posed for beneficent designs and actions.  
You can't lay a greater obligation upon  
him than by proposing ways in which  
he may be useful, or enlarge his sphere  
of usefulness: For this is the point in  
which all his views, all his desires, all his  
satisfaction, center.

Add to this, that he is inclined to a-  
bate of his right, when insisting too



32 *The characters of the righteous*

SERM. strictly upon it may have the appear-

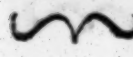
II.  ance of harshness and severity; and has such a strong sense of benevolence, such an exalted spirit of humanity and compassion, that no considerations of *private interest*, no difference of *nation* or *religious profession* can restrain; and which the *greatest injuries* cannot bear down and extinguish. He aims that his goodness may be as *diffusive* as possible, and as much like that of the universal parent, the supreme and eternal fountain of good, who supports, enlivens, and recreates the whole creation; and therefore, as he is generous in all his designs, he is very fearful of disobliging any either by word, or action, and endeavours, in the whole of his conduct, to be agreeable as well as useful to all; being candid in his censures, practising to his inferiors the most endearing condescension, and carefully avoiding moroseness, and every thing that has the appearance of insolence and contempt. Finally, that I may conclude the sketch, which I design'd, of this most beautiful and honourable character, the *good* man is unwearied in his endeavours

endeavours to promote the happiness of SERM.  
others; the ardour of his benevolence is **II.**  
not cool'd tho' he meets with ungrateful  
returns; the trouble and expence of the  
service don't discourage him; nay, he is  
ready to give up all private considera-  
tions for the sake of the public wel-  
fare, and even to sacrifice *life itself*, when  
the good of the world requires it. This  
shall suffice for the first head: I proceed  
now,

To shew, **SECONDLY**, the superior  
excellency of the *good* man's character to  
that of the *merely righteous*, or just man.  
An attempt of this kind must, I am per-  
suaded, be thought almost needless, after  
what has been already said. For the  
placing the two characters, truly drawn,  
in the same point of view, that they  
may be fairly consider'd and compared  
together, will so strongly illustrate the  
beauty of the beneficent character, that  
the other will be look'd upon as a foil to  
set it off to the greater advantage, and  
perhaps not be regarded and valued as  
it ought. And as the mind of man is so  
framed, as immediately to prefer gene-

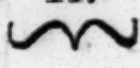
34 *The characters of the righteous*

SERMONIOUS beneficence to strict and rigid jus-

II.  tice, there is the more difficulty in enlarging here; because there is scarce a medium of proof to be found, that is clearer than the thing itself at first sight. The truth appears at once, upon comparing our ideas; and in all cases which are so plain, and, in a manner, self-evident, 'tis sufficient to appeal to the reason and common sense of mankind; and very difficult to argue in such a way, as not to perplex and darken the subject. However, I shall suggest a few things, in which the difference of the characters mentioned in the text will be readily acknowledged. And

1<sup>st</sup>. The character of the *good* man is much more *amiable* in itself. Justice indeed, so far as it goes, is not only an irreproveable character, but rational and becoming; but no man will say that it has any thing *great* and *generous* in it, because 'tis, indeed, the least degree of virtue that can be suppos'd in social life. — 'Tis approv'd of, but not admir'd — We don't think ourselves oblig'd to the person that does it, since 'tis, really, as little



little as he can do for us ; justice being SERM.  
what all have an undoubted right to II.  
claim — And therefore there is properly   
no *merit* in it, nothing that exalts and  
*dignifies* a character, because 'tis expected  
from all who have any notion of good  
and evil, and are not quite lost to vir-  
tue.

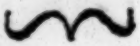
But benevolence, *disinterested*, *generous*,  
*diffusive benevolence*, is the highest perfec-  
tion and glory of human nature. It ar-  
gues true greatness of mind, and is a vir-  
tue that men of mean and narrow spirits  
cannot practise. — 'Tis not only a right,  
but a *beautiful* character, that charms the  
beholders, and attracts universal esteem  
and love. — Even the most dissolute and  
profligate can't help being struck with it  
in others, however they may neglect to  
excel in it themselves. — And the finest  
and most shining qualities, the most ex-  
cellent endowments of nature, and high-  
est improvements of art, are *low* and *de-*  
*spicable* in comparison of it, and derive all  
their *luster* from it. Without it, riches  
are *insolent* and *arbitrary*; power is *op-*  
*pressive* and *tyrannical*; and wisdom mis-  
chievous

36      *The characters of the righteous*

SERM. chievous *craft* and *subtilty*, or, at best,

II. vain and uselefs *ostentation*.—I appeal to  
 the reason of mankind, whether if any  
 one was to form the most lovely and  
 amiable, and at the same time the great-  
 est and most heroic character he could  
 possibly devise, it would not be that of  
 the *generous* and *faithful friend*, the *libe-  
 ral compassionate benefactor*, the *disinter-  
 ested* and *noble-minded patriot*, who dif-  
 fuses relief, comfort, and happiness all a-  
 round him; is enlarg'd beyond mean and  
 selfish views; and considers himself, as a  
 member of the grand community of  
 mankind, born for the general good.

Again, the superior excellence of *good-  
 ness* to *justice* is evident from hence, that  
 the latter is necessarily included in the  
 former, as the less in the greater; but  
 without benevolence, justice, instead of  
 being a finished, is a very *defective*  
 character; nay it forms, upon the whole,  
 a bad character, a *little, narrow, selfish*  
 character, that is justly the object of con-  
 tempt. This will be more fully illus-  
 trated by applying it to the supreme  
 being, whom if we suppose to be only  
 just,

just, and not absolutely and universally SERM.  
 benevolent and merciful, we entirely de- II.  
 stroy the foundation of those exalted,   
 honourable, and lovely conceptions of  
 him, which wise and thinking men, in  
 all ages, have entertain'd. But his good-  
 ness, his unlimited goodness, which is so  
 gloriously display'd in the frame of our  
 own nature, in the whole constitution of  
 things, and the whole course of provi-  
 dence, renders him the worthy object of  
 our trust and confidence, and of our su-  
 preme love and delight.

2dly. As the *good* man's character is  
 much more lovely in itself, so is it more  
*useful* than that of the *merely righteous*  
 or just man. By justice mens properties  
 are, indeed, in a good measure secur'd,  
 and injury and violence, and consequent-  
 ly much confusion and mischief in the  
 world, is prevented; but the greatest  
 part of the true enjoyments of life, of  
 the conveniencies and comforts of it, a-  
 rise from *benevolence*. Without justice,  
 societies could not subsist; but without  
 benevolence, if they might possibly sub-  
 sist (which can hardly be imagin'd) they  
 would



SER M. would infallibly be miserable. Mankind

II.  are form'd for society, and, by means of their large and extensive capacities, may be exceedingly useful to each other; but if one were to do for another no more than he could *strictly claim*, very little good would actually be done, and thus the design of their social nature must be defeated, and the present being be extremely uncomfortable. For of the man that is only just the utmost that can, generally, be said is, that he is not a mischievous creature; but he may be *insignificant*, a kind of *blank* in the creation: He does no wrong or injury to any; but then he contributes very little to the positive happiness of the world. No: 'tis *generous friendship*, the *tender sympathizing temper*, the *open and liberal heart* that make pleasure circulate, and alleviate the cares of life. And did men, universally, study how to be useful, and practice beneficence in its greatest latitude; were their interests consider'd as dependent upon, and inseparably connected with, each other, and a constant intercourse of good offices maintain'd among

mong all who are united in the com-<sup>SERM.</sup>mon bonds of humanity; the face of <sup>II.</sup> things would be alter'd unspeakably for the better, and the world be as happy, as the imperfection and frailty, and many unavoidable casualties of the present state will admit of. But mere justice can't introduce any thing like this desirable and delightful scene; and, consequently, is vastly inferiour, in respect of real advantage to mankind, to the exercise of benevolence, to which, *partial* and *limited* as it is, the far greatest part of the happiness that is in the world is undeniably owing.

3dly. The *good* man's character is not only more useful than that of the *just* man, but its influence is abundantly more *extensive*. In matters in which *active justice* is concern'd, men are, generally, confin'd to a narrow circle. With regard to those, with whom they have no dealings or commerce, their *justice* amounts to no more *in most cases*, than not being *unjust*.

But

SERM. But persons of whom we *know nothing*,

II. and with whom we never had *any communication*; persons who are at the *greatest distance* from us; and whom, whether we consider their numbers, the different places of their abode, or the variety of their circumstances, the most remote consequences of our *justice* or *injustice* can't be supposed to reach; may feel the kind effects of our generosity and compassion. And as its influence is so much wider, and, at the same time, the benefits that accrue to the world by it beyond comparison greater, than can result from the mere exercise of justice, this is a convincing and unanswerable demonstration of its superior excellence. And considering the *vast usefulness* of this virtue, together with its *intrinsic beauty*, 'tis no wonder that it engages the admiration, the affection, and gratitude of mankind to such a degree, that *for a good man some would even dare to die*. There is another thing,

4thly. Which I know not whether it be any ground of the apostle's observation



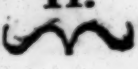
tion in the text, but yet it deserves to be SERM.  
 taken notice of, as it evidently shews the II.  
 superior excellence of *goodness* to *strict*  
*justice*; and that is, that when a man is  
 just, but not benevolent, he can't be sup-  
 pos'd to act from a *right principle*. —  
 Not in obedience to *the authority of God*,  
 which would determine *universally*; and  
 not suffer him to neglect one of the most  
 important laws which God hath given to  
 mankind, while he pretends a zeal for ano-  
 ther that is of inferior consequence. — Nor  
 from a regard to *the fitness of the thing*  
*itself*, because that, likewise, would influ-  
 ence, in a stronger manner, to the exer-  
 cise of benevolence, which is a much  
 more *exalted* virtue. 'Tis therefore a  
 reasonable presumption, that he is just  
 only from selfish views; at least, he can  
 have but very lame and confused no-  
 tions of religion and morality, and must  
 proceed upon mean and narrow prin-  
 ciples. Whereas, on the contrary, the  
*good* man, in the utmost extent of that  
 character, can't but have the *noblest* views,  
 and an uncommon *generosity* and *great-*  
*ness* of soul. He imitates the father of  
 the

42 *The characters of the righteous*

SERM. the universe, acts from the same sublime

II. motives, and in pursuance of the same  
 most excellent and worthy end. But I  
 can't enlarge on these things, tho' they  
 are of the utmost importance, and the  
 strongest possible recommendation of the  
 good and beneficent character.

Give me leave, however, to make one  
 observation more before I conclude this  
 head, tho' it be of a different kind from  
 the foregoing, and that is, that there is  
 an argument for charity and generous be-  
 neficence, suggested in the text, from *private interest*; as it tends to procure uni-  
 versal love and esteem, and powerfully  
 engages our fellow creatures to do good  
 offices for us in circumstances where they  
 are most needed, and even with *inconve-  
 nience* and *damage* to themselves. Dis-  
 interested kindness and compassion have  
 a natural tendency to soften the *hardest*  
 hearts, and win upon the most *barbarous*  
 and *savage* tempers. The most *vitious*  
 can't think of offering any insult to it with-  
 out the utmost reluctance; but, where  
 there is *a sense of virtue*, there will be the  
 highest esteem of it. And tho' perhaps,  
 there

there are very few, who, if matters were SERM.  
driven to that extremity, would really lay II.  
down their lives for the most obliging   
and useful man, yet he would have many  
friends who would ardently desire his wel-  
fare, compassionate and relieve him in his  
distresses, and chearfully contribute to his  
happinefs. So that *generous benevolence* to  
mankind is more for our interest, in the  
present world, than a *churlish sullen* beha-  
viour; and much more than *malice, cru-*  
*elty*, and *revenge*, which render a person  
despised, or hated, by all. Such an one  
will, in all probability, be served with  
fegret, be *envied* in his prosperity, and *in-*  
*sulted* in his misery. I shall now conclude  
with these two reflections.

1<sup>st</sup>. We may infer, from what has been  
said in this discourse, the great wisdom and  
goodness of God in the frame of human  
nature; which is so formed, as strongly  
to approve of kind beneficent actions, e-  
ven when it has no *particular interest* in  
them; and has an *immediate abhorrence* of  
malice and cruelty. Benevolence (as has  
been shewn) is the chief dignity and glory  
of mankind, and that virtue on which all

D

the



SER M. the advantages and happiness of social life,

II. in a great measure, depend. The all-wise  
 ~~~~~ creator, therefore, hath graciously provided for it in our very make and constitution; and not only endued us with reason, whereby we are capable of contriving and consulting for the good of others, but planted in us such strong *instincts* and *natural propensions* to kindness and compassion, as can't be over rul'd and extinguish'd without losing humanity itself; and, by this means, he hath counterballanced the principle of *self-love*, which, were it not for our benevolent affections, would engage us in narrow schemes, and little mean pursuits, inconsistent with the welfare of society, and the general happiness of our fellow-creatures.

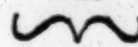
2dly. We learn the excellency of the *Christian Religion*, which has carried the noble principle of benevolence to its highest pitch, and improv'd it to the utmost perfection it is capable of. The whole strain of Christianity is love, harmony and peace, condescension and mutual forbearance, tender mercy and compassion. The charity, which it recommends, *suffereth long and is kind,*

kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not SERM.
 puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, II.
 seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, I Cor. iv.
 thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, 5, 6, 7.
 but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all
 things, believeth all things, hopeth all
 things. — Nay we are commanded to
 be rich in good works, ready to distribute, I Tim. vi.
 willing to communicate; — and even 18.
 to lay down our lives for the brethren; I John iii.
 walking in love, as Christ also hath loved Eph. v. 2.
 us, and hath given himself for us, an of-
 fering, and a sacrifice to God for a sweet
 smelling savour. — And on this command
 our Saviour lays a peculiar stress, and
 makes it the very characteristic of a Chri-
 stian.

Our holy religion inculcates farther,
 not only the most *disinterested* and *generous*,
 but the most *extensive* benevolence; love Luke iv.
 to ALL MANKIND, notwithstanding 55.
 difference of *nation, religion, interest*; Chap. x.
 love even to our *enemies, not rendering evil* 24, &c.
for evil, or railing for railing, but contra- Gal. vi.
riwise blessing. — It gives us frequent af- 10.
 furances, that this virtue is, in a parti- I Pet. iii.
 cular manner, pleasing to God, and will 9.
 entitle us to a most glorious reward. — Mat. xxv.
34, &c.
2 Cor. ix.
6, 7.

46 *The characters of the righteous*

SERM. It sets before us an example of it, in our

II.  own nature, in the character of *the author and finisher of our faith, who went about doing good*; and requires, that we

Acts x.
38.

look not only on our own things, but every man also on the things of others; and that the same mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus; who, tho' he was in the form of God,—made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and, to accomplish our salva-

Phil. ii. 4,
Ec.

tion, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.—Nay, it proposes to our imitation the example of the supreme

Luke vi.
36.

creator and father of mankind, whose goodness is unlimited and universal; especially in giving his son to die for us,

1 John iv.
10, 11.

even whilst we were enemies; for if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

From this short view of the christian doctrine 'tis plain, that it lays down the most exalted scheme of benevolence, supported and enforced by the strongest motives. And, indeed, it has ever been reckon'd one of the chief intrinsic excellencies of

of Christianity, that the goodness it recom- S E R M.
mends is so *pure* and *disinterested*, and aims, II.
as much as possible, at promoting the *ge-
neral happiness*. But yet, upon this very
account, has it been reflected on, as if it
had pass'd by, or lost in a *general, loose*
and *undetermin'd* charity, two of the most
sublime and noble instances of benevo-
lence, *private friendship*, and *the love of*
our country. I intend, therefore, to take
this for the subject of my next discourse,
wherein I shall endeavour to shew (besides
the unanswerable reasons that there were,
from the circumstances of the world at
that time, why these things should not be
particularly inculcated) that both private
friendship, and the love of our country,
so far as they have any thing truly ratio-
nal and excellent in them, are included
in, and must be entirely subservient to,
the great law of *universal benevolence*,
which is an infinitely more important and
generous principle; that particular friend-
ships may be extremely *base* and *mischie-
vous*, and the love of our country sup-
porting a faction against *the common rights*
of mankind; but that, on the contrary, to

SERM. be steddy and inflexible in our endeavours

II. to promote the *universal good*, tho' we are
oblig'd, in order to it, to sacrifice private
friends, nay the interests of any single so-
ciety, how great and flourishing soever, is
manly, noble, godlike.





S E R M O N III.

The perfection of the Christian scheme of benevolence; in answer to the objection from its not having particularly recommended private friendship, and the love of our country.

ROM. v. 7.

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die.



HAVING, in my last discourse, S E R M. III.
shewn the excellency of benevolence, that 'tis vastly superiour to justice, and the noblest virtue in social life; and having
D 4 prov'd

SERM. prov'd the peculiar excellency of the

III. *Christian scheme* of benevolence, not only as 'tis most disinterested and generous, but of universal extent and influence; not to be confin'd by any difference of nation, religion, interest, nor suppress'd and extinguish'd by personal injuries: I proceed now to answer an objection that has been rais'd against it, by a late *noble*, and justly *celebrated*, writer, from its not particularly inculcating *private friendship*, and the *love of our country*. 'Tis thought very strange, that these, which are rank'd among the most *heroic* virtues, should be *purely voluntary in a Christian*, and *no essential parts of his charity*. * In order, therefore, to set this matter in a just light, I shall

- I. Settle the notion of private friendship, and the love of our country, and shew how far they are truly virtuous and honourable. And then,
- II. Offer a few things, more directly, to vindicate the Christian benevolence against the force of this objection.

I. I am to settle the true notion of private friendship, and the love of our country, and shew how far they are truly virtuous and honourable. 'Tis undeniable, that both these principles have been grossly abus'd. Private friendships have been only little parties in vice and mischief, and public disorder; and an attachment to the interest of particular societies has been a vile conspiracy against justice, honour, liberty, and the peace and happiness of the world. 'Tis necessary therefore that we settle their proper bounds, that none may be led away, by the mere force of agreeable and bewitching sounds, so as to pervert what, if rightly understood, are really *amiable* and *useful*, into *monstrous*, *unnatural*, and *hurtful* qualities.

Universal benevolence, then, is the *supreme law* to all rational beings, a law of eternal and immutable obligation, the authority of which ought not to be superseded, limited, or, in the least, weakened by any selfish or partial affections. For if there be any beauty and amiable-
ness,

SERM. nefs, at all, in doing good, the more ex-

III. tended our views are, it must be so much
 the more meritorious and honourable;
 and, consequently, to aim at the uni-
 versal good must be the highest degree
 of virtue. — Nothing forms so great
 and worthy a character. — 'Tis indeed
 the chief part even of God's moral rec-
 titude; — and must, therefore, be the
 supreme dignity and perfection of human
 nature. Again, the happiness of the whole
 species can't be *too intensely* pursued;
 whereas all other affections are no longer
innocent, than while they are, at least,
 consistent with this; are only *virtuous*, so
 far as they directly promote it; but are
base and *detestable*, when they interfere
 with it.

To apply this to the case of *private*
friendship. When my love of a
 friend is inconsistent with the regards
 I owe my country; and especially when it
 opposes the general good of mankind,
 to whom all my services are more imme-
 diately and strictly due; 'tis an *unnatural*
 affection, and ought to be rooted out of
 the mind; because were it universally
 indulg'd,

indulg'd, it would introduce the utmost SERM. confusion, and an entire subversion of all III. order and government. No man can support his friend by interrupting the course of *justice*, or violating the rules of *honour*, who is not an utter stranger to virtue; but, on the contrary, must it be a *noble* action, agreeable to *reason*, *humanity*, and every *benevolent* and *social* principle, to desert him for the publick good. And this being the great rule, by which we are to determine, in all cases, concerning the expediency and fitness of private friendships; it follows farther, that they have nothing truly generous in them, but as they tend to cultivate and improve *universal benevolence*; and are a natural means to make the *whole species* happy.

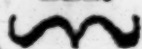
For if they are not chosen for this reason because they are best upon the whole, if they are only not contrary to the public happiness, but have no direct influence to promote it, our views must be mean and selfish; and friendship will become a mere matter of *private convenience*, or else of *humour* and *fancy*,
in

SERM. in either of which cases it must be un-
 III. certain and variable, as circumstances,
 W opinions, and interests alter; or finally,
 it will be only *the love of our selves*, i. e.
 of the resemblance of our own way of
 thinking, dispositions, and manners, in
 others; and, consequently, nothing like
 that sublime and heroic virtue for which
 it has been recommended, and which,
 indeed, it is in itself, so long as 'tis *the*
medium of universal benevolence.

Again, all friendship, in order to its
 being truly rational and praise-worthy,
 must be founded in *virtue*. For this is
 the only ground of that esteem and
 steady confidence, which are inseparable
 from a worthy and generous friendship.
 'Tis in this way alone that it can be at all
 useful, or, in any measure, promote the
 end of every lesser alliance, *viz.* the wel-
 fare of the great community of mankind.
 'Tis this that distinguishes true friend-
 ship from the vile cabals of robbers and
 traitors, men of dark and mischievous
 designs, who may have all the other
 characters of it, such as a similitude of
 " tempers, passions, interests, secrecy, con-
 " fidence,

Christian scheme of benevolence. 55

“fidence, constancy, nay, a reciprocal
“tenderness and affection for each other.”

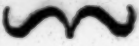
SERM.
III.


And from hence it follows, that the love of a friend must be proportioned to his real merit, otherwise 'tis foolish and unreasonable *partiality*; and that we ought to prefer every man before him, that has, really, a more excellent and useful character. In our *esteem* we must necessarily do it, unless our private affection has blinded and perverted our judgments; and there are some cases supposable, in which, if we would not forfeit the glorious title of being the *friends of mankind* for a little fantastic name of friendship, we must do it in our *services* too. Suffer me to give an instance, in which this is indisputable. Suppose there is an office in the state to be dispos'd of, of vast consequence to the common welfare, that requires, to the right discharge of it, very great and distinguish'd abilities, and that the competition for it lies, entirely, between my most intimate friend, and another with whom I never cultivated any familiar acquaintance, but have only a general knowledge of; if my friend

SERM. friend be unskilful and indolent, and I
 III. have reason to believe, from a thorough
 ~~~~~ experience of his temper, that he will  
 behave ill in it, to the detriment of the  
 public; and the other has a much better  
 judgment, more generosity, steadiness,  
 command of his passions, and is qualified,  
 upon all accounts, for greater usefulness;  
 — Can I be long in suspense which to determine  
 for?—Shall I compliment my *friend* at the  
 expence of my *country*? Such friendships as  
 these are so far from being instances of  
 virtue, that they would be justly branded  
 with infamy: and whoever acted thus could  
 have no real benevolence in him, which  
 can never prefer a less good to a greater;  
 nor, consequently, the advantage and  
 pleasure of *an individual*, or the gratifying  
 his selfishness and vanity, to the  
*general* happiness.

I may add, that there is something, in  
 almost all accounts of private friendship,  
 that is in a great measure *mechanical*. A  
 high esteem of a wise, virtuous, and useful  
 character, an ardent zeal to serve our  
 friends, and faithfulness to their interests,  
 is

*Christian scheme of benevolence.* 57

is what all may attain to; but the fer-<sup>SERM.</sup>  
vour and strength of passion that some-<sup>III.</sup>  
times mixes with it, what we may call   
the *enthusiasm* of friendship, depends very  
much upon a particular constitution. —  
'Tis the more gross part. — And tho'  
it be highly extolled, and is apt to strike  
in the relation, and beget the strongest  
prejudices in favour of friendship, 'tis  
rather by engaging our *affections*, than  
convincing our *judgment*. — What is  
most valuable in it is the deliberate and  
rational part, which is founded on prin-  
ciples of generous and universal benevo-  
lence.

And as there is a great deal *mechanical*;  
there are other things very highly cele-  
brated, which, if they are prescrib'd as  
general rules and laws of friendship, are  
*wild* and *romantic*. For instance, 'tis  
magnified as a most noble and heroic  
action for a man to sacrifice all private  
interest, and even life itself, for his friend.  
I shall not dispute the disinterestedness and  
generosity of it, nor that it may, in some  
cases, be, upon the whole, very commen-  
dable; but there are others, in which,  
it

SERM. it will be easy to shew, that it may not  
 III. only be *rash* and *imprudent* in him, but inconsistent with *prior* and more *important* obligations.---The circumstances of his *family*, and others whose happiness nearly depend upon him, ---his importance to the *society of which he is a member*, ---and usefulness to *the world in general*, --ought all to be consider'd; and may be very strong arguments to prevail with him to preserve himself. And if for the sake of a friend, who, tho' possess'd of several amiable qualities, may be of little consequence in active and social life, he deprives his children of a kind protector and guide, and the state of a wise experienc'd counsellor, the chief asserter and guardian of its liberties; and consequently over-rules the strongest impulses of *natural affection*, and the regard he owes his *country*, and *mankind*; his friendship is evidently founded on the ruins of *reason* and *humanity*. Let us therefore separate the *mechanical* part, and all *extravagant transports*, from private friendship, and consider it as a thing that reason may approve and justify; and we shall find, that 'tis  
 nothing



*Christian scheme of benevolence.* 59

Nothing more than the *reciprocal esteem* SERM.  
and *affection* of *virtuous* minds, united by III.  
a harmony of inclinations, views, and  
interest, all *upright* and *generous*; —  
That it never exceeds, in any instance,  
the rules of *justice*, *truth*, and *honour*; —  
is always subservient to the great law of  
*universal benevolence*; — and valuable,  
not as 'tis an attachment to private per-  
sons, but as a means of promoting the  
cause of virtue, and the happiness of the  
world.

The same may be said of *the love of our country*, viz. that 'tis a rational and vir-  
tuous disposition; not merely, as 'tis a re-  
gard for a *particular part* of the species;  
but as it has a tendency to advance the  
*universal good*. To love our country on-  
ly because we *were born in it*, without  
carrying our views to any thing farther,  
is weak and childish; the prejudice of  
*education* and *custom*: This is making  
*mere chance* the ground and rule of our  
affection, and not the dictates of reason  
and virtue: Or are we strongly attach'd  
to the inhabitants of a particular spot  
only upon this account, our being engag'd

E

to

SERM. to defend and support each other?—This  
 III. is debasing a very noble principle, and  
 ~~~~~ making it *mean* and *selfish*. In order,  
 therefore, to raise it to so great and heroic a virtue as it has been represented, we must seek out some other foundation for it. Now the true state of the matter I take to be this.

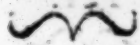
For their security against injury and violence, and to answer, in the most effectual manner, the great end of their benevolent and generous affections, mankind found it necessary to form *particular societies*: The reason of supporting these voluntary combinations is not only *self-defence*, but because such a method is for the *general good*: These two ideas ought never to be separated, because things can't continue in a regular and natural state, but while the good of every part is consider'd as subordinate to the good of the whole: Now the good of the whole is unquestionably best promoted, by every person's having a hearty affection for the society to which he belongs, and a strong zeal for its welfare: This is his immediate concern;—the station and sphere of
 of

Christian scheme of benevolence. 61

of usefulness that providence has assign'd SERM.
him.—And to be indifferent about his III.
country, nay, indeed, not to cultivate an
ardent love of it; but instead of this,
to amuse himself with forming idle
schemes for the benefit of *foreign* nations,
to whom he is no way related, nor, per-
haps, likely to be known, nor, conse-
quently, to have so much influence among
them, as to be able to reduce his schemes,
were they ever so beneficial, to practice;
is very preposterous and extravagant: 'Tis,
in effect, resolving to be useless, and neg-
lect the good of mankind altogether.

Since, therefore, a love of the *public*,
i. e. of the particular civil community of
which we are members, and a generous
defence of its laws and liberties, is the
only way, that men, in general, have,
to contribute their share to the happi-
ness of the species, and, if universally cul-
tivated, a natural means of effecting this
noble and most desirable end; we must
resolve the merit of it chiefly into this,
and enlarge it beyond *narrow, contracted*
views, if we would make it a sublime and
heroic virtue: The undeniable conse-

SERM. quence of which is, that 'tis only a ra-

III.  tional principle, when 'tis entirely consistent with, and subservient to the supreme law of universal benevolence. —

It ought never to propose *a distinct interest* from that of the whole; for then it immediately ceases to be an amiable and useful quality, and becomes one of the most vile and mischievous: For instance, when it prompts any to extend their territories by unjust conquests, to oppress and plunder weaker states, and spread slavery and destruction thro' the world; in all such cases, when a particular country is *a wicked faction* against the rights of all mankind, which, it would be for the general good, to have suppress'd and extirpated, no one who has any sense of generosity can rejoice in its success: Love of our country is then a *private* affection, and must give way to the *public* one: And tho' we may be so far concern'd for its prosperity, as to lament the degeneracy and violence that prevails in it, and even to hazard our lives to remedy its disorders; we can't surely wish well to it any other way, while 'tis carrying on

such

such

such

Christian scheme of benevolence. 63

such mischievous schemes; we can't re-^{SERM.}
joice in its victories, without declaring ^{III.}
ourselves enemies to justice, liberty, and
the universal happiness, and, consequently,
being monsters of iniquity and cruelty.

It appears upon the whole, that both
private friendship, and the love of our
country are only so far amiable and gene-
rous, as they are branches of universal
benevolence. Nothing can be a virtuous,
a great or noble, but what is also a *use-*
ful quality; and 'tis an infallibly right
rule of judging in all cases of benevo-
lence, which may seem to clash and in-
terfere with each other, to aim at the
greatest and *most extensive* good: So that,
if there be a real necessity, I am to sacri-
fice my friend for the sake of my coun-
try, and my country for the general hap-
piness of mankind. Universal benevo-
lence, therefore, is infinitely the most ex-
alted and heroic spring of action, because
the universal good can't be pursued to *an*
excess; but private friendship and the
love of our country may be so perverted,
as to become mischievous and destructive
principles; The former is intirely *dis-*
interested,

SERM. *interested*, and can proceed only from the

III. love of goodness, and, consequently, is a most *godlike* disposition; the latter may both spring from *little, selfish* motives, and terminate in a *narrow private* interest: The former contains every instance of restrain'd and partial affection, that has any thing great and lovely in it, and is therefore the *whole sum* of social virtue; whereas the latter, without more enlarg'd views than the mere pleasure of a friend, or the welfare of our country, forms a character so far from being eminently good, that it wants *the very essentials* of true goodness. And this, alone, is sufficient to vindicate our saviour's scheme of benevolence, and give us a high idea of its *excellency* and *perfection*. I proceed, however, in the

SECOND place, to offer a few things, more directly, in answer to the objection that has been made against it, from its not recommending, particularly, private friendship, and the love of our country. And,

1st. There is one circumstance, which has been already hinted, that will go a great

Christian scheme of benevolence. 65

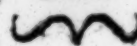
great way, of itself, to remove this seem-
ing difficulty, *viz.* that the Christian
principle of universal benevolence in-
cludes both these, so far as they are
founded in *reason*, and have any thing
virtuous and *praiseworthy* in them: *Uni-*
versal benevolence must, in the very na-
ture of the thing, comprehend every spe-
cies of *real* benevolence; and a com-
mand to promote the general good, neces-
sarily implies all the proper means of do-
ing it; and, consequently, every instance
of private friendship, and zeal for the
interests of particular communities, that
appears to have this natural tendency.

'Tis no just objection against moral
discourses, that they lay down, chief-
ly, general rules for the right con-
duct of life; for these alone are *eternal*
and *unchangeable* morality: and the true
application of them to particular cases
must be left to every man's own reason,
because it depends on a variety of cir-
cumstances, that alter the expediency of
things. To apply this to the point before
us; The great law of benevolence is to
aim at the happiness of the whole spe-

SERM. cics : This is a proper rule for all mankind, and obliges persons of every complexion and character; but the manner in which it may be done is, to different men, very different, and, consequently, must be referr'd, in a great measure, to their own judgment and discretion: Nor is this likely to create any confusion, because general principles are easily accommodated to particular circumstances, where there is an honest mind, and the least degree of reflection: For every one that thinks must immediately see, that nothing can be an act of real benevolence which opposes the universal good; and will soon discern in what cases, private friendship and the love of our country are a fit means to advance it.

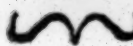
Let me observe farther, tho' the *noble* author, whom we are considering, seems to think it a *strange* supposition, that private friendship is not a matter of *strict* and *indispensable* duty upon all, but, for the most part, a *purely voluntary* engagement. General benevolence is a fix'd, immutable, and universal duty. An esteem of good and virtuous characters is
always

always rational, because 'tis necessarily SERM.
connected with the love of virtue itself: III.

But this is not the notion of friendship; 
which is a "*peculiar relation*, form'd by
"a consent and harmony of minds *," as
well as founded in virtue; from whence
'tis an undeniable consequence, that it
can't be every man's duty, since it evi-
dently depends on circumstances that are
quite out of our power. There are in-
numerable instances, in which persons
may find several among their acquaint-
ance, and in the same sphere of life,
whom they highly esteem, but not one
proper to be chosen for a *close* and *intimate*
friend; so that the recommending
private friendship, *in the general*, must
have been very absurd, since 'tis only a
rare and *accidental* obligation, and never
falls in the way of a great part of man-
kind. And, besides, it might have been
attended with mischievous effects; for
the bulk of the world, thinking it a duty
of religion, and a necessary branch of sub-
lime and heroic virtue, would enter in-

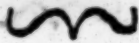
* *Characteristicks*, Vol. i. p. 98. in the marginal note.

SERM. to *rash, unconcerted, and disagreeable* alli-

III.  ances, which must, naturally, produce a great deal of disorder, and disturb the peace of societies: Whereas while they act upon the principle of universal benevolence, no ill consequences can ensue; and, therefore, the inculcating this principle only, as an essential part of morality, and leaving private friendship to fall in as a branch of it, just as prudence, on a view of all circumstances, directs, is the *wisest* and *best* way of instructing mankind. We may add farther,

2dly. To vindicate our Saviour's conduct on this occasion, that there has been very little need, in any age, to put men upon cultivating particular friendships, and the love of their country; but rather to give a check to these narrow limited affections, and correct the exorbitancies of them. Mankind have a *natural* inclination to both, and there is no fear of their neglecting either, so far as 'tis truly generous and useful; on the contrary, the only danger is, that they will be carried to so great a height, as to be prejudicial to the general good. The experience of our
own

Christian scheme of benevolence. 69

own times, and the history of all ages, is SERM.
an ample justification of the truth of this III.
remark. 

Friendships have always been frequent enough.—But of what kind are they?—do they not spring from *humour* and *caprice*, from a harmony of *odd, whimsical*, and *unaccountable* tempers, from *singularity* and *selfishness*?—or are they built upon the solid foundations of *honour* and *virtue*? In like manner, zeal for the interest of a particular country is it not *universal*?—But then is it truly *benevolent* and *publick spirited*? Far from it: 'Tis more commonly an absurd and childish prejudice, that makes men so extravagantly fond of themselves, as to treat all other nations with insolence and contempt: 'Tis a zeal that makes an *idol* of our country, and is ready to sacrifice even the good of the whole species to it: There was no reason, then, that our Saviour should particularly inculcate these things, to which mankind have so *natural* a turn, and are so apt to indulge *to excess*: His great work was to rectify all disorders, and, in an especial manner, *the abuse of good principles*, and the extravagancies

SERM. gancies that arise from it; and this he
 III. has effectually done, in the case before
 us, by enforcing the obligations of universal goodness, which will *regulate* all inferior affections without *destroying* them: For the observing this rule will lead to every instance both of friendship, and love of our country, that is really *amiable* and *beneficial*, and discourage such only of either kind as are *unmanly*, and *mischievous*. Let me observe,

3dly. That there was a *particular reason*, from the circumstances of the world at that time, why the Christian religion should not directly and strongly recommend the love of our country: In general, 'tis not a thing necessary to be insisted on, because 'tis included in the love of mankind, and what all are powerfully inclin'd to by education, custom, their own particular interest, and the like; but rather expedient that such narrow prejudices should be remov'd, by inculcating more generous and extensive views: And 'twas much less to be expected at a juncture, when an affection for particular countries was a *general nuisance*, and triumph'd

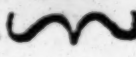
triumph'd over justice and humanity: For SERM.
'tis well known, that the *Jews* were so III.
partially fond of their own nation, that
they look'd upon themselves as the only
favourites of heaven; which made them
severe and rigid in their censures, and
morose and unfociable to all who were
not of their religion: And, undoubtedly,
the notion that seems, generally, to have
prevail'd among them, that the *Messiah*
was to be their temporal prince, and ex-
tend his dominion over all the earth,
would have put them on subduing and
oppressing other countries, as soon as they
imagin'd they had a favourable oppor-
tunity for it: They wanted nothing but
the power to effect this vile and barba-
rous design, which their *selfishness* and *pride*
suggested.---And as for the *Romans*, whose
noble lectures of benevolence and gene-
rosity are so much boasted of, and their
love of their country represented as the
very perfection of heroic virtue; the
Romans, I say, were the *plagues* and
scourges of mankind, and had actually
carried their arms and conquests, and, to-
gether with them, terror, slavery, and
ruin,

SERM. ruin, thro' the greatest part of the then
 III. known world.

— Was this now a time to recommend narrow views, and an attachment to particular societies, when the *general interest* had suffered so much by it? ---- It was rather the way to have destroy'd *public benevolence* altogether: The proper lesson to be inculcated, in such a confus'd and degenerate state of things, was certainly *universal goodness*, in order to put a stop to the progress of ambition, avarice and luxury, which had introduc'd such dreadful desolation, and subverted liberty, justice, and all social virtues: This was the only remedy that could be applied to the prevailing disorder: So that our Saviour's scheme of benevolence is not only, in itself, the *noblest* and most *godlike* that we can conceive of; but in keeping to fundamental and general principles, and not descending to lesser considerations, he acted the part of a *wise reformer*; — a friend to the *universal happiness*; ---- and an enemy to *oppression* and *tyranny*. Suffer me to add

In

Christian scheme of benevolence. 73

In the last place, that tho' the Chris-^{SERM.}
tian religion has not particularly enjoin'd ^{III.}
private friendship, and the love of our 
country, because, so far as they have any
thing virtuous and commendable in them,
they fall in necessarily with the regular
pursuit of the general good; and because
'twas needless in itself, this being the con-
stant bent of human nature; and finally,
because 'tis always more proper to restrain
the excesses of these principles, than to
allow them scope and latitude; and was
so *particularly* at the time of our Saviour's
appearance; tho', I say, for these very
sufficient and weighty reasons, they are
not directly enjoin'd in the Christian re-
ligion, yet 'tis *a false insinuation*, that it
has given no encouragement to them:
For we have, in the character of Christ
himself, an eminent example of each of
these virtues, which is equally binding, as
an express law, upon all who acknow-
ledge his authority: He chose but twelve
persons to be his immediate and constant
followers, and one of them he made his
friend: Accordingly we read, in the his-
tory of the New Testament, of *the dis-*
ciple

SERM. *ciple whom Jesus loved; whom he always*
 III. treated with confidence, and particular
 marks of tenderness and affection. —

Joh. xix.
 20.

Here was a friendship that sprang from *virtue*; from a consent and harmony of the most *benevolent, mild, and amiable* dispositions; it was intirely *rational, disinterested, generous and faithful*; subservient to the *universal good*, being founded in the love of goodness itself; and consequently a perfect pattern for our imitation.

And was not his weeping over *Jerusalem*, from a sense of its impending ruin, a noble proof of his ardent concern for the *public welfare*? were not all his labours to make his people happy, by reforming their corruptions and vices? was it not for this that he suffer'd so many abuses? — nay, did he not *even die* for the good of his country? I may add to this the example of *St. Paul*, who was so transported by his affection for his countrymen, as to wish that the greatest of evils might befall himself, even to be *accurs'd from Christ*, if, by that means, he might be the instrument of preserving

Rom. ix.
 3-

Christian scheme of benevolence. 75

serving and establishing their prosperity. SERM.
III.
These are instances, than which, if we take in all circumstances, none ever were, or can be, more great and heroical; and had they been found among the old *Greeks* or *Romans*, they would have been celebrated with the most labour'd and magnificent encomiums. But when men set themselves to magnify the powers of reason, and run down revelation, every thing, in the latter, has a *low* and *invidious* turn given to it; the most godlike virtues lose their lustre; and the most exalted scheme of morality is debas'd and vilified; as in the case we have been considering, Christianity is represented as being defective for what is its chief excellency, and renders it vastly preferable to any system of moral philosophy, or any institution of religion, that ever appeared in the world.

Let us then be persuaded to cultivate, to the utmost, disinterested and universal benevolence; for what is the perfection of our religion must also be the rectitude and honour of our nature. — Let our constant aim be the

F

good

76 *The perfection of the Christian, &c.*

SERM. good of mankind. — Let us enlarge

III. our minds, daily, from little narrow
~ prejudices, that all our private pleasures,
our friendships, our regards to our coun-
try, may be regulated with a view to
this as their ultimate end. — Nay, if it
were possible, we should extend our
thoughts beyond our own species, and
take in *the whole universe of rational be-
ings*; for the more unbounded scope we give
to our generous benevolence and compas-
sion, the more truly noble it is; and the
more nearly do we resemble the supreme
fountain of goodness, whose *tender mer-
cies are over all his works.*



SERMON



S E R M O N IV.

Of the image of God in man; or
the excellency of human nature.

GEN. i. ver. 7. the former part.

*So God created man in his own
Image, in the Image of God
created he him.*



HERE is no part of know-^{SERM.}
ledge more considerable than ^{IV.}
a right knowledge of human
nature: It is of the utmost
importance towards the regular conduct
of life; and all the errors of mankind
in point of morality, *i. e.* the most fatal
errors that reasonable creatures can be
guilty of, are certainly owing to their

78 *Of the image of God in man:*

SERM. not understanding, or not seriously considering, their own frame and constitution: And yet it may well be wonder'd at, that men should be such great strangers to the design of *their own* nature, and of all the objects of knowledge, know the least of *themselves*; of *themselves*, I say, whom they are fond of even to excess, and whose welfare they necessarily desire, but while they continue in this state of ignorance cannot pursue: For unless we examine into our own make, and consider the powers and capacities wherewith we are endued, and the ends which the great Author of our being design'd us for, 'tis impossible we should understand our *duty*, or our *happiness*.

Indeed, human nature has been represented in so *base*, *disagreeable*, and *monstrous* a form, that the contemplation of it must needs be frightful and shocking to a generous mind; as having lost its noble powers of reason and liberty, and being the seat of nothing but irregular, impure, and mischievous passions; as incapable of any thing that is good and virtuous,

or the excellency of human nature. 79

tuous, and prone to all manner of vice SERM.
and wickedness. — And if this were true, IV.

who could take any satisfaction in looking into himself, when he must behold such a *hideous picture of deformity*? —

But, thanks be to God, the honour of our nature may be easily vindicated from such unjust reproaches, as will, I hope, evidently appear from the ensuing discourse; and, besides, such an account of it is, in its direct consequences, of the utmost prejudice to the interests of religion and morality: For as, on the one hand, a right sense of the dignity of human nature inspires great designs, leads to the most beneficent, generous, and Godlike actions, and is a strong preservative from every thing that is vile and dishonourable; so, on the other, when it is described as having nothing excellent or amiable in it, and as a complication of *mean-spiritedness, ill-nature, ignorance* and *vice*; and when, upon this foundation, injustice, cruelty, ingratitude, pride, revenge, and the worst of villanies are represented as *natural* to mankind; this has a manifest tendency to encourage their

80 *Of the image of God in man:*

SERM. degenerate and licentious practices, and

IV. furnishes them with an excuse for their wickedness, *viz.* the *necessary* corruption and depravity of their nature. And finally, if this be a true *picture* of human nature, what must we think of the *great original* from which it was copied? must not the giving such a character of it be highly dishonourable to the supreme, and immutable perfection of its glorious author? The consequence is plain and undeniable: For *God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.* In discoursing farther on these words, I shall

I. Show, wherein the image of the Deity, in man, consists; and that not only the *first parents* of the human race, but *all mankind since*, notwithstanding the corrupt and degenerate state of the world, were originally formed after the image of God. And,

II. Conclude with some proper and useful inferences.

I. I am to show wherein the image of the Deity, in man, consists; and that not only the *first parents* of the human race, but *all mankind since*, notwithstanding the corrupt and degenerate state of the world, were originally formed after the image of God. Some commentators have imagined, that by the image of God, in which he created our first parents, is meant a *visible splendor*, a *glory* that constantly attended them, and resembled, in some degree, the *Shechinah*, which was the glorious Symbol of the divine presence: But this is matter of mere conjecture, and of very little consequence in itself. I shall therefore insist no longer upon it, but proceed to mention some things that are more plain and certain, and of general and evident importance.

Man is a being partly *sensitive*, and partly *rational*. There can be no resemblance of his great Creator in the sensitive part of his frame, because HE is a pure and infinite spirit: And therefore when bodily parts, and such passions as frail men experience, are attributed to

82 *Of the image of God in man:*

SERM. the great God in Scripture, we must understand such descriptions, as used in condescension to our weakness, and narrow imperfect conceptions of things; and interpret them in such a manner, as will make them consistent with plain passages that assert the *spirituality* of the divine nature, and with the reason and nature of things. It remains then, that man can bear the image of the Deity only in his intelligent nature. And,

IV.
Gen. i. 26.

1st. He resembles his Creator in his *reason*, and *understanding*; whereby he is capable of making very considerable improvements in knowledge, and of discovering all those truths which are necessary to the right management of his conduct, and to secure his perfection and happiness: in that he is not impelled and determined by mere instinct, but is capable of considering and examining the nature and consequences of things, and of making a deliberate and wise choice: And this, very probably, is one of the principal things intended in the text. For God, having finished the inanimate and animal

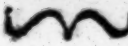
or the excellency of human nature. 83

animal creation, is describ'd, as pro-SERM.
ceeding to the making a being in his IV.
own *image, after his likeness*, i. e. a
reasonable creature, who must, consequent-
ly, resemble him the *supreme* and most
perfect reason; and the great privilege
designed to be conferred upon this being
was a dominion over the inferior crea-
tures, in order to which reason was
absolutely necessary. And because rea-
son is the most eminent distinction
and glory of the human nature, by which
man, as Lord of the lower world, is
highly advanced above the other be-
ings that inhabit it, 'tis not unlikely,
that the historian represents the Deity
as proceeding to this part of his cre-
ation with *peculiar ceremony*, to do
honour thereby to this excellent nature,
and give us a becoming sense of its im-
portance and dignity. But,

2dly. The image of God, in man, has
a respect, farther, to the *moral rectitude* in
which he was created. The rational prin-
ciple within him *strongly* directed to all the
duties of piety; to the practice of justice;
and the exercise of benevolence, one of
the

84 *Of the image of God in man :*

SERM. the brightest characters of the Deity, in

IV. all its branches ; to which last virtue he
 was also excited by *peculiar* instincts, that
it was impossible for him entirely to
suppress without losing humanity itself.
And as to his passions, they were all
in a regular state, and subject to the
government of reason ; which was capa-
ble of keeping them within their pro-
per bounds, that they might not, at any
time, be extravagant and disorderly. This
was the *first* happy state of man. And in
consequence of his understanding, the great
compass of his rational powers, his mo-
ral rectitude, and particularly, the kind
and benevolent affections of his nature,
(in which consisted his more immediate
resemblance of his maker) he was ap-
pointed to exercise dominion over the in-
feriour creatures; and so to be the *represen-*
tative of the great author and governour
of nature in this lower world, and dis-
pense his authority. I have given this
short and general account of the image
of God in man, that I might have time
to demonstrate, what is of the greatest
impor-

or the excellency of human nature. 85

importance, and the only thing that SERM.
IV.
can make a discourse on this subject useful to us, *viz.* That, in all these respects, not only the *first parents* of mankind, but their *descendants*, were originally formed after the divine image. And,

1st. None will deny that mankind are *reasonable* creatures, how much soever they may be inclined to diminish the *excellency*, and weaken the *force* of human reason: And, I think, it can, with as little justice, be denied, that the reason of mankind is able, in all important instances, to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil; and that their intellectual faculties are of very *large extent*, formed for making great and wonderful discoveries, and capable of being, for ever, enlarged and improved; so that, as reasonable creatures, they still evidently retain the image of God. And this, I believe, will be easily allowed, and the only question will be, whether mankind, in their *original formation*, before they

86 *Of the image of God in man:*

SERM. they are perverted and corrupted by pre-
 IV. judices of education and custom, the
 influence of evil examples, and vitious
 habits wilfully contracted, still retain the
 image of God, with respect to *moral recti-
 tude.*

Now that this is really the case ap-
 pears from hence, that they have under-
 standing to direct the impulses and af-
 fections of the animal nature, to consider
 when they are to be indulged, and when
 restrained, to form just notions of happi-
 ness, and regulate the desire of present
 sensitive pleasure, that it may not interfere
 with the rectitude of their higher powers,
 and the exercise of benevolence towards
 their fellow-creatures; that, having a
 principle of reason and liberty, they
 must be capable of knowing, loving,
 and serving God their Creator, and su-
 preme governor, and of the pleasures of
 mutual benevolence and friendship, as
 well as of governing their animal pas-
 sions, by keeping them within due bounds,
 and controuling them when they grow
 licentious and extravagant; and that this
 is the *direct tendency* of human nature,
 even

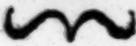
or the excellency of human nature. 87

even in its present state. For human na-^{SERM.}
ture, even in its present constitution, is a ^{IV.}
reasonable nature, and the reasonable na-
ture of man has no *evil* tendency, but
directs to the pursuit of wisdom and vir-
tue, and to suppress all corrupt desires.

For instance, is it not *agreeable to hu-
man nature* to reverence the great author
and governour of the world, and secure
his protection and favour, on whom we
absolutely depend, by an imitation of his
perfections, and obedience to his com-
mands? Does not *nature* teach us to be
just and charitable, to compassionate the
miserable, and relieve the distress'd? are
not these virtues suitable to our *strongest
affections* and *instincts*? and the contrary
vices, by the universal consent of man-
kind, branded as *inhuman* and *monstrous*?
Again, is it not *natural* to us to seek and
endeavour to promote our own happiness,
and, consequently, to mortify all those evil
appetites, which are the sources of corrup-
tion and misery? Or does our *nature* direct
us to rebel against the author of our being,
to prey upon our own kind, to delight in
oppression and injustice, and in the misery
of our fellow creatures, and to be agita-
ted

88 *Of the image of God in man:*

SERMON. ted by wild and extravagant desires which

IV.  sink us even below the condition of brutes? Mankind may, indeed, degenerate into this miserable state, but, still, all must allow that this is not *human nature*, but a most dreadful *depravation* of it; for our reasonable nature teaches us to abhor these things: So that, according to *Solomon's* observation, in all ages of the world, *God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.* For the *original integrity* of human nature does not consist in having no temptations to vice, but in being able to subdue and conquer such temptations: Which it must be capable of doing as it has reason to direct it to what is right and fit to be done, and a power of choosing freely, and consequently of acting according to its right judgment of things.

Ecclef. vii.
29.

It must, after all, be confess'd, that there is a *sickness* and *disorder*, in our mortal frame, introduced by the fall, which, considering the closeness and intimacy of their union, may be supposed, in some measure, to affect the mind: It may be a clog upon our reasoning powers, and

or the excellency of human nature. 89

and strengthen the animal passions : But SERM.
this is entirely a *natural*, and not a IV.
moral defect ; which can't arise, in any
instance, from bodily constitution, but
only from a perverseness and depravity of
the will : And such natural disorders are
only, like external objects and circum-
stances, *occasions* of, and *temptations* to
vice, and consequently of no weight
against any part of the preceding argu-
ment.

The grand foundation of mens error,
in judging of these things, has been this,
either that they have taken their estimate
of human nature from the *sensitive* and
brutal part of it, and not from the *in-*
telligent and *moral*, and represented to
their minds, as the *original* state of it,
such evil dispositions and habits as are of
their own creating ; or else, that they
have understood particular passages of
scripture, which give the character of
the most profligate and abandoned sin-
ners, as describing the *natural* temper of
all mankind ; and strained strong *figura-*
tive expressions, which are very frequent
in the eastern languages, to their highest
sense,

90 *Of the image of God in man:*

SERM. sense, contrary to the general design of
 IV. the revelation, as well as the plain reason
 of things: And, indeed, if persons will
 proceed in such an *undistinguishing* way,
 'tis no wonder they bring themselves to
 believe any thing, however absurd and
 in itself incredible. Let me only add,
 that as it is a plain and obvious truth,
 how much soever mens partial views
 of things, and misapprehension of some
 doubtful passages of scripture may con-
 found and darken it; that human nature,
 even in its present state, is a reasonable
 nature, and that to such a nature as this
 vice and wickedness, of all kinds, is neces-
 sarily repugnant: besides, I say, that this
 is an obvious truth; such a sense of things,
 which is so much the honour of human
 nature, and of the great God, who for-
 med it to resemble his own perfections,
 must yield abundant satisfaction to every
 pious and every generous mind.

I shall but just mention, that man con-
 tinues still to bear the image of God, in
 respect of his dominion over the inferior
 creatures. The *inanimate, vegetable, and*
animal world are useful to him various
 ways;

or the excellency of human nature. 91

ways; some by their labour; others for
food and clothing; and not only admi-
nister to his necessities, but contribute,
jointly, to the convenience and ornament
of life: And it may be questioned, whe-
ther it would be possible for him, in
some instances, to exercise his dominion
in the manner he now does, were it not
for a kind of *instinct* planted in the na-
ture of animals, to acknowledge him as
their superior Lord. But I dismiss this
head, and proceed

II. To make some useful inferences
from what has been said. And,

1st. Let us be thankful to God for
having so distinguished and *honoured* our
nature, as to form it after his own image.
Our *rational* and *moral* powers, by which
we resemble the Deity, are the chief ex-
cellency and advantage of our nature: By
these we are eminently advanced above
the brute creatures, rendered capable of
the pleasures of society and friendship,
and of improvements in knowledge and
virtue: 'Tis by means of these powers,
G that

92 *Of the image of God in man:*

SERM. that we *alone*, of the whole visible world,
 IV. are fitted to contemplate the great author
 of the universe, and celebrate the glory
 of his perfections. Are we not then under the strongest ties of gratitude, by our united praises, to excite, in one anothers minds, a warm and affectionate sense of his goodness, and a generous ambition of imitating his most excellent character? Shall we omit a duty, for which we are so *peculiarly* formed, and the obligation to which arises, immediately, from our very make and constitution? And as the noble faculties, with which he has adorned our minds, qualify us for paying him a *voluntary* homage and obedience, shall we not testify our sense of this high favour by the most entire and chearful resignation, and devotedness to his service?

All the laws, by which he governs us, are the result of most perfect wisdom and goodness, and calculated to promote our supreme perfection and felicity; and therefore piety, justice, charity and temperance, or the regulating our affections and desires, are essentially our duty by the very frame of our nature: And if we are wilfully deficient in any one branch of it;
 if

if we are thoughtless and inconsiderate, and SERM.
negligent of our actions, we are unworthy IV.
the name of *reasonable* creatures, and
highly affront the wise and bountiful au-
thor of our beings, who hath bestowed
that excellent character upon us.

2dly. Let us maintain a just sense of
the *worth* and *dignity* of our nature, as
we have the *honour* to be formed after
the image of God: I mean, that we
should value it in such a degree, as is ne-
cessary to enable us to support our cha-
racter, and inspire sentiments of generosity
and virtue. 'Tis a *laudable* greatness of
mind to preserve such an opinion of the
excellency of our nature, as shall restrain
from base and disgraceful actions: And no
thought will more effectually answer this
end, than that of our being made in the
likeness of the greatest and best of beings:
Shall such a one dishonour himself so far,
as to relinquish the noble entertainments
of the mind, which are peculiar to rational
beings, for those gross and sensual gratifica-
tions, which he enjoys in common with
inferiour and irrational creatures? and
thereby from being exalted to a resem-
blance of the Deity, sink into the condi-

94 *Of the image of God in man:*

SERMON. tion of a *mere animal*? An ingenuous

IV. spirit would reject all temptations of this
kind with *scorn* and *indignation*.

Or shall I consent to become *viler* than a brute, by rooting out of my nature the principles of benevolence and compassion, which are the most lovely and adorable perfections of the supreme being, and making myself a *monster* of cruelty and revenge?

When reason, which, by the skilful hand that formed us, was placed in the seat of government, is subjected to blind and headstrong appetites, and we are the *slaves* and the *sport* of passion; when we are ashamed of a wise and regular conduct, and steadily adherence to the rules of religion, or afraid of the consequences, and sacrifice our virtue to worldly honour and advantage; when our intelligent and active powers, which are fitted for such noble purposes, and high employments, are lost in *indolence* and *sloth*; when instead of being useful to others, and cultivating, in our minds, habits of justice, and universal charity, we practise oppression, fraud, and injury; alas! how wofully is that excellent nature *debased*, which was
formed

formed for such high advancement, and SERM.
even for godlike perfection? Where is, IV.
then, the *amiable image* of the Deity, our
chief ornament and glory! Nay, I may
ask, where is *humanity* itself! For 'tis
reason alone that makes men of us, and is
the most distinguishing part we bear of
the divine image; and therefore *as men*,
and creatures resembling the great author
of our beings, we ought to have a just and
constant sense of the dignity of our rea-
sonable nature, that we may never be
tempted to do any thing unworthy of it.

3dly. The notion, that man was made
after the image of God, teaches us to love,
respect, and honour our fellow creatures,
as well as to set a just value on ourselves:
For the affection and respect being due to
human nature, or rather to the degrees of
reason and *moral perfection*, its resemblance
of the Deity, which appear in it, is
equally due to it in my neighbour as in my
own person; and can't be with-held with-
out doing injustice, and shewing contempt
both to the *image*, and *original*. Cruelty,
even to brute creatures, is a certain sign of
a very base and degenerate mind; but it
must be attended with peculiar aggravati-

96 *Of the image of God in man :*

SERMONS, when 'tis exercised towards such as

IV. bear a resemblance of our maker : And
 therefore 'tis very remarkable, that when
 God appointed, by an express command,
 that murderers should be punished with
 Gen. ix. 6. death, this reason is assign'd for it, *for in
 the image of God made he man.*

Upon the same account every lower injury must be criminal in proportion ; and the contrary duties of benevolence and mercy necessary and indispensable. And, doubtless, 'tis for this reason, among others, that the love of God and of our neighbour are represented, in scripture, as having an inseparable connection with each other ; which, indeed, is very evident, even from the nature of the thing. And since ALL mankind are made after the likeness of God, our good will to them must be *universal* : For we act a very contradictory and inconsistent part, if we profess a reverence and esteem of the God of *human nature*, the father of *the spirits of all flesh*, and pretend to celebrate the glory of his *universal* goodness ; and, at the same time, confine our good offices to a particular *family, nation, or religious profession* ; and are hard hearted to all the rest,
 who,

or the excellency of human nature. 97

who, equally, bear the impresson of his SERM.
excellent and divine image. IV.

Again, as we believe that we were made in the image of God, and to act in imitation of his example, 'tis our duty to exercise our dominion over brute animals with *lenity, moderation, and mercy*: For by unnecessary severities and cruelties towards them, we manifest a barbarous and savage temper of mind, and consequently that we have lost those sentiments of goodness and pity, which are our most glorious resemblance of the great Creator; and act contrary to those excellent rules, which he himself adheres to in the government of the universe. And I can't help observing upon this occasion, that our treatment of brute creatures, who, in respect of their many services to mankind, as well as from the regard due to our *common Creator*, have a claim to much better usage from us, must be matter of great uneasiness to persons of a benevolent and generous disposition; not only upon the account of the misery which they endure; but because the barbarous instruments of their misery are so far from having that merciful temper, which the Christian religion recommends,

98 *Of the image of God in man:*

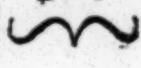
SERM. that they seem, almost, to have forgot
IV. common humanity.

4thly. Since no part of the image of God appears in the constitution of our bodies, and the animal frame, but all in the intelligent nature; let us not value ourselves chiefly upon health, strength, beauty, or any other enjoyments that are external to the mind, but upon cultivating our rational powers, and our moral perfection; or, in the language of scripture, on our being *created, after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness.*

Finally, we learn, from what has been said, to value the Christian religion, the chief view of which is to purify and exalt human reason, obscur'd and debas'd by superstition and vice, and restore the *original rectitude* of our nature: This great design it is very wisely adapted to promote. For the laws of this excellent revelation have a necessary tendency to the supreme perfection and happiness of reasonable beings; and it enforces the observation of them, in which consists our nearest and most honourable conformity to the nature of God, by the most important and encour-

Rom. i 18. raging motives. By the gospel, *the wrath*
of

or the excellency of human nature. 99

of God is reveal'd from heaven, against SERM.
all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, IV.
who hold the truth in unrighteousness. 

Therein, likewise, are given unto us ex- 2 Pet. i. 4.
ceeding great and precious promises, that
by these we might be partakers of a divine
nature; particularly the promise of a glo-
rious resurrection to eternal life, when the
faculties of the mind will be enlarged, and
its pleasures more pure and substantial;
and when even this corruptible and animal
frame will be raised a spiritual body, and
put on incorruption and immortality; and,
consequently, instead of being a clog upon
the rational nature, be assisting to it in its
most refined operations. Then it will be
seen, in a much more glorious manner than
it ever has been in this world, or than it
could have been if mankind had retained
their primitive innocence, that *God made
man in his own image*: Then the hu-
man nature will appear in its fullest lustre
and dignity.

I can't conclude without observing,
that even the *positive* institutions of Chri-
stianity are calculated to advance the same
blessed design, namely, to restore and per-
fect the image of the Deity in us; as, by
their

SERM. their tendency to establish and confirm

IV. good dispositions, they assist and promote
the pursuit of *real* and *Godlike* virtue.

Let us be persuaded therefore, in the use of those means which our holy religion prescribes, to get as great a resemblance of our maker, in his *moral* character, as is possible; that we may hereafter be admitted into the regions of light and immortality, where we shall be more completely *like him*, because we shall *see him as he is*, and improve in this likeness, and consequently, in honour and felicity for ever.



SERMON



S E R M O N V.

God not an arbitrary being.

ROM. ix. 20.

*Nay, but, O man, who art thou
that repliest against God? —*



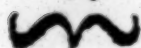
HO' religion be in itself most SERM.
excellent, and founded on the V.
highest reason, there is a great
deal of skill and judgment
required in order to a rational and suc-
cessful defence of it. We ought not only
to understand it thoroughly ourselves, be-
fore we attempt to recommend it to o-
thers, but should take care to support
it by none but *solid* arguments, that will
bear being examined, and stand the test
of

SERM. of a strict and critical enquiry; and to
 V. give *proper* answers to the objections of
 its adversaries. For, by an ill management, we may injure and expose the best cause in the world; and when the opposers of religion find that our arguments for it are weak and trifling, they will easily be persuaded to triumph, as if they had gained a compleat victory; and imagining, tho' without just ground, that this is all that can be said in vindication of it, their prejudices will be more strong and invincible: This is especially true with respect to our reasonings about the *providence* of God, upon which all religion depends. The same way of answering objections will not do in all cases; but, on the contrary, what may be very properly urged at one time, will, at another, leave the truth quite naked and defenseless; nay, in the opinion of the ignorant and prejudiced, strengthen the cause of *infidelity*.

Thus the words of the text were very *pertinently* applied by St. *Paul*, as I shall have occasion to shew in the following discourse; but have been used by others, who overlook the particular case of which

which the apostle was treating, in an-SERM.
swer to objections to which they are by V.
no means adapted; objections that are
really *unanswerable*, being against supposed
methods of conduct in the Deity, which
are absolutely inconsistent with justice
and goodness: And since, besides this,
such principles have been inferred from
them, as represent the supreme and most
perfect being under the character of a
mere *arbitrary* sovereign; and render it
impossible for us to *judge of*, or *argue*
from his moral perfections, which are
the only foundation of amiable concep-
tions of him, and of the true peace
and comfort of mens minds, as well as
the surest rule we have to direct us in
our religious enquiries; I think I cannot
imploy your time more profitably, than
in settling the true sense of this text,
and guarding it against misconstructions:
Especially if it be considered, that 'tis
but too natural for unthinking people to
make ill uses of it, injurious to the ho-
nour of God, and the cause of piety and
virtue. I shall therefore,

I. Point



I. Point out two or three things that are not imply'd in it.

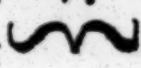
II. Propose a few cases, to which, if they could happen, and were urged as objections against the providence of God, it would not be a sufficient and rational reply. And then,

III. Shew to what cases these words may be properly applied.

I. I am to point out two or three things that are not implied in the text, but are false and groundless inferences from it. And,

1st. We ought not to infer from it, that God is a despotic *arbitrary* Sovereign, whose *will* is the only rule of his actions. The great God, tho' he be supreme and accountable to none, always governs himself by the eternal and unalterable rules of wisdom, equity, and goodness: His will is not, *itself*, the standard and measure of right; but there is an intrinsic necessary difference, in

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in the *nature of things*, between just and SERM.
unjust, beneficence and cruelty, that can- V.
not be altered by the authority, will, or 
determination of any being whatsoever.
Indeed, what God wills is always right
and fit, always, upon the whole, fittest
and best. But why? not merely because he
wills it, but because he is necessarily wise,
just and good. For can any man imagine,
that if he should will to deceive, to vex
and torment his innocent creatures, and
employ his infinite power only to make
them miserable (which is a very possible
supposition, if his *will alone* be the rule of
his proceedings) such a conduct would be
justifiable; nay, for even this must be
maintained as a necessary consequence
from such principles, that it would be
better and more *praise-worthy* than righte-
ousness, truth and mercy?

There cannot be a more dishonourable
reflection on the Deity, than to suppose
he acts without a reason, merely from
humour, and *arbitrary pleasure*: It repre-
sents him as a *tyrant*, not as a *wise* and
righteous Governour: It renders him
frightful to our contemplations, the ob-
ject

SERM.ject of *aversion* and *horror*, and destroys
 V. all rational esteem and love of him, and
 confidence in him: All expectations of
 favour from him must sink and vanish
 at once. For who knows how such a
capricious being, who is not determined
 by reason and justice, but makes his will
 his only law, who can know, I say, in
 what manner he will act? — What pos-
 sible assurance can there be, that he will
 not resolve on the *misery*, and *ruin*, of
 his rational creatures? Nay, if he has
 promised the contrary, can we have any
 probability that the same *arbitrary will*
 that made, will not also break the pro-
 mise? Mere will and humour are *fickle*,
uncertain, *changeable* things, but truth
 and goodness are *steady* principles, and a
 solid foundation for our trust and hope.
 I shall only add, that the representing
 the Deity in this manner renders him
 infinitely more *formidable* than any *earth-*
ly tyrants ever were, or can be, even
 those who have been the greatest scour-
 ges and plagues to mankind, because he
 is possessor of almighty and uncontroulable
 power; and the thought of almighty
 power,

power, that is not directed by wisdom SERM.
and goodness, must fill the mind with V.
the utmost *astonishment* and *terror*.--Shall
we then give such a *reproachful*, such a
detestable character of the most perfect,
the most amiable of all beings? —
Shall we picture the very *best* of beings
as the very *worst*? — And represent
him, in whose unerring wisdom, strict
impartial justice, and universal unchange-
able goodness, the whole rational world
have the highest reason to *rejoice*, as one
that every wise man must wish *not to*
exist.

2dly. It can't be inferr'd from the text,
that men are not to enquire into the rea-
sons of God's proceedings; or that they
are, in no cases, able to judge of the jus-
tice of his methods of providence. For
God himself, in the scriptures, frequently
appeals to mankind concerning the equi-
ty of the general rules of his providential
government: From whence 'tis plain,
that even he, that most perfect being,
who is directed by absolute and invaria-
ble reason, would not have us *believe im-*
plicitly that any thing is just because he

H

does

SERM. does it; but only requires of us to approve of it so far, as we can reconcile it to the general principles of justice and equity. In making this appeal God evidently supposes, that the *reason* of mankind is not only capable of judging in *matters of religion*, but of determining concerning *his actions*; at least concerning the fitness of the *general rules*, by which he governs the world: And therefore men are *over modest*, when they refuse to allow their reason that honour which the great Creator himself has done it; when they represent it as blind and erroneous in cases of the highest importance; and as knowing no more, and having no more distinct and proper ideas of the moral perfections of the supreme Governour, than the brutes that are void of understanding. Little do they consider how much they dishonour and disparage the *infinite wisdom* of God, when they disgrace and vilify their own reason; how much, I say, they dishonour the infinite wisdom of God, who hath appealed to this *discarded, abandoned* reason to decide in points of the utmost

most consequence, and as the rule by SERM.
which we must be *ultimately* conducted, V.
in all our religious enquiries: For, in-
deed, whether God had appealed to it or
no, men must, if they think, necessarily
follow its directions; and no authority
whatever, however it may *restrain* and
terrify, can make them *believe* any prin-
ciples, or approve of any actions as *just*
and *right*, which are evidently repugnant
to it.

And if we are capable of judging con-
cerning the equity of those rules by which
the divine government is exercised, the
general principles of justice must be the
same both with respect to God and man.
If they are different with respect to our
Maker, and are something *mysterious*, and
incomprehensible, *we know not what*, 'tis
impossible we should be able to determine,
in any instance, whether the divine con-
duct be just, or unjust; for how can we
judge *without ideas*? And thus an essen-
tial perfection of the Deity will be im-
possible to be demonstrated by us, which,
notwithstanding, is a fundamental prin-
ciple of all religion. Indeed there may

SERM. be difficulties, to such imperfect and
 V. short-sighted creatures as we are, in judg-
 ~~~~~ ing of *particular actings* of providence,  
 for want of understanding the *entire scheme*  
 that the great governour of the world is  
 pursuing; but if we suppose that God  
 himself can, for instance, punish his  
 creatures for what they could not help,  
 and yet be clear of the charge of *in-*  
*justice*, we confound and destroy the ne-  
 cessary and immutable distinction be-  
 tween good and evil; and make it im-  
 possible for mankind to imitate his moral  
 perfections, in which their highest honour  
 and happiness consists. We could, then,  
 have no probability what kind of beha-  
 viour was likely to be pleasing to him,  
 nor what scheme of religion was most  
 worthy of him: Nay we could not be  
 sure that the *best* of men would not be  
 the objects of his displeasure, and the  
*worst* his peculiar favourites; and, con-  
 sequently, the practice of religion, and  
 pursuit of virtue, would really be, as its  
 enemies misrepresent it, no better than  
*enthusiasm*.

And

*God not an arbitrary being.* III

And from what has been said it necessarily follows, that the supreme being will never think we do him honour, if we give such an account of the conduct of his providence, as contradicts *our natural notions of justice and equity*: Nay, to say that he is *unjust* may be more honourable to him, than to give him the character of a *righteous* being. For upon the supposition that the general notion of justice is *quite distinct*, in God, from what it is in man; if we say the Deity is unjust, we say a thing of which we have no certain determinate idea; and, consequently, nothing that is directly injurious to his absolute perfection: The word injustice is a mere *empty sound*, without meaning. But if we affirm that he may deceive his creatures, or punish them beyond what their iniquities deserve, we represent him, *really*, as an evil, vitious being, one whom every wise and good man must abhor; and, consequently, fix a reproach upon his character, that no *nominal compliments* can atone for. For even such imperfect creatures as we, if

SERM. *just and good* were made to signify *tyranny and cruelty*, should be so far from being fond of accepting the title, that we should reject it, if it was offered us, with disdain and indignation.

There is a phrase commonly used, which, perhaps, has led some persons into the mistakes I have been guarding against, *viz.* that the end which God designs, in all his actions, in the creation and providential government of the world, is *his own glory*. The expression itself is, undoubtedly, capable of a just and rational sense; but has been grossly misapplied, and made to signify, what it can never fairly signify, something *distinct* from, and even *inconsistent* with, the exercise of justice and goodness. And, indeed, 'tis natural for men to interpret it agreeably to the notions they entertain of God; and, consequently, with persons whose apprehensions are different, it will have a quite different meaning, and be either true, or false, as their apprehensions are rational or otherwise. Thus, if men conceive of God as a mere *absolute sovereign*,



reign, according to them, his glory must consist in the exercise of an *uncontroulable* and *unaccountable* sovereignty, and every thing will be right, merely because he wills it, and has resistless power to effect it. But this, I have shewn, is figuring the almighty being as a *tyrant*, who delights in nothing but lawless will, and arbitrary dominion; whereas the true glory of a sovereign is in the wisdom, justice, and clemency of his government. Again, if we imagine it to be the chief attribute of the Deity, that he is *strict* and *rigorous* in punishing; his glory will be most eminently displayed when he is most *stiff* and *inexorable*, when he has most of *stern, inflexible severity*, and least of *mercy*. But if we believe him to be necessarily *wise, righteous, and good*, it will then be his chief glory to exercise an *equal* and *impartial*, but, at the same time, a *gracious* providence over all his creatures; and invariably to pursue the fittest measures to promote the *general good*. And I may appeal to all mankind, if they will lay aside their prejudices, and consult only their reason, whether this does

SERM. not give a vastly more honourable and  
 V. amiable notion of him, than the describ-  
 ing him either as an *arbitrary sovereign*,  
 or an *unrelenting judge*. The glory of  
 God can't be a distinct consideration  
 from the exercise of his moral perfec-  
 tions for the happiness of his creatures,  
 because in this view he appears most ex-  
 cellent, and in the highest honour and  
 dignity, as creator and governour of the  
 universe, and the compassionate father of  
 all intelligent beings: And a defect in  
*power, knowledge, or extent of dominion*,  
 would not stain and obscure his glory,  
 in any degree of comparison, like acts of  
*injustice, and cruelty*. I proceed now,

2dly. Having pointed out some gene-  
 ral principles that are falsely inferred  
 from the text, *nay, but, O man, who art  
 thou that repliest against God?* to men-  
 tion, briefly, a few cases, to which if they  
 could happen, and were urged as objec-  
 tions against the providence of God, it  
 would not be a *sufficient, and rational*  
 reply. And, in general, such an answer  
 must be very *weak and trifling* in all  
 cases,

cases, that are evidently repugnant to SERM.  
justice and goodness. Thus, if we could V.  
suppose, that God had absolutely deter-  
mined the final and eternal misery of  
great numbers of his rational creatures;  
or that he tempted and excited them to  
sin; that he enjoined impracticable duties,  
and punished any for not believing or  
not doing impossibilities; if these extrava-  
gant things, I say, could be supposed of  
the supreme and all-perfect being, who  
is *righteous in all his ways*, and whose  
*tender mercies are over all his works*; it  
would be the most *impertinent* thing in  
the world, to think to satisfy the reason  
of mankind by resolving all into his  
*sovereignty*, and saying *who art thou, that*  
*repliest against God?* The *sovereignty* of  
God, and his right to act as he pleases  
in cases where justice is not concerned, is  
not the thing disputed, but his *equity* and  
*goodness*; which can only be vindicated  
by shewing, either that the above-men-  
tioned methods of acting are not instances  
of *arbitrariness* and *cruelty*, or that arbi-  
trariness and cruelty, which are reckon'd  
monstrous



SERM. monstrous crimes in all other beings, are  
 V. no *blemishes* in God's government of the  
 world.

Indeed, had I a notion of the supreme creator and father of mankind (I speak it with quite different sentiments, and with the highest esteem and reverence of his moral character) but had I really a notion of him as destitute of equity and benevolence, and acting only for the ostentation of his supreme power, and sovereign dominion, I might, perhaps, think it *prudent* not to complain, that I might not expose myself to the resentment of so terrible an enemy; — but would there be ever the less *reason* for complaint? The *mouth* of the *objector* might be stopped by his fears; — but would the *force* of the *objection* be at all abated? It could not be, as long as there remained any difference in actions, any distinction of just or unjust. For if *power alone* does not constitute right, (and if it does, the most powerful, in every degree, must be *universally*, and without *exception*, the most righteous) the *greatest* being, be his power

power ever so extensive, and his domi-  
nion ever so uncontroulable, can have no  
more authority to be unjust and cruel  
than the meanest; but, on the contrary,  
will be, in proportion, a more *evil* and  
*mischievous* being, and more justly the ob-  
ject of universal abhorrence. It remains  
to be enquired,

3dly. To what cases the words of the  
text may be *properly* applied. Now this  
will be best determined by considering  
the particular argument the Apostle was  
pursuing, and to which they immediately  
relate. In the 2d and 3d verses of this  
chapter, he laments, in a very *pathetic*  
manner, the dismal fate of his country-  
men, who were cast off from being the  
people of God, and devoted to destruc-  
tion, for their wilful opposition to the  
gospel, after they had been long distin-  
guished by peculiar and extraordinary  
priviledges. In the 6th verse he insinu-  
ates an objection, *viz.* that by rejecting  
the *Jews*, the *word*, or promise of *God*,  
which was made to the seed of *Abraham*  
would not have its *effect*; and, in answer  
to

SERM. to it, observes these two things. 1<sup>st</sup>. That  
 V. the descendants of *Jacob*, or *Israel*, did  
 not make up the whole of *Israel*, or  
 the people of God comprehended in the  
 promise; but as he argues more distinct-  
 ly in the 4th chapter of this Epistle,  
 ver. 11, &c. all those *Gentiles* were in-  
 cluded, who trod in the steps of *Abra-*  
*ham's* faith; and, consequently, the call-  
 ing them to the advantages of the *Mes-*  
*siah's* kingdom was not *frustrating*, but  
*fulfilling* the promise. And, 2<sup>dly</sup>. That  
 the promise was never made to all the  
*natural* race of *Abraham*. This he proves,  
 ver. 9. from the words of the promise  
 it self, *at this time will I come; and*  
*Sarah shall have a Son*. Nor was this  
 the only limitation of the seed of *Abra-*  
*ham*; for, as he adds, *when Rebecca also*  
*had conceived by one, even by our Father*  
*Isaac, (the children being not yet born,*  
*neither having done any good or evil, that*  
*the purpose of God, according to election,*  
*might stand, not of works, but of him that*  
*calleth) it was said unto her, the elder*  
*shall serve the younger*. The sense of  
 which



which words is plainly this, that " God, SERM. V.  
" while the children were yet in their mo-  
" thers womb, and, consequently, before  
" they could, by their actions, either re-  
" commend themselves to his favour, or  
" merit his displeasure, determined that  
" the posterity of *Esau* should serve those  
" of *Jacob*; in order to shew, that his  
" making any family, or race of men,  
" his peculiar people, or, in other words,  
" his taking them under his special pro-  
" tection, and conferring extraordinary  
" advantages upon them, depended on  
" his own wise purpose, as having a  
" right to bestow his favours on whom  
" he pleased, and not on any works and  
" deserts of theirs." That this whole  
paragraph does not at all relate to *Jacob*  
and *Esau* considered *personally* is evident  
from hence, that it is not true *personally*,  
but only in a *national* sense, that *the*  
*elder* did *serve the younger*. Again, the  
text in *Genesis*, to which here is a reference,  
proves unquestionably, that this was  
the only thing intended in the promise:  
*Two NATIONS are in thy womb, and*  
*the*

SER M. *the one PEOPLE shall be stronger than*

V. *the other PEOPLE, and the elder shall*

*Gen. xxv.*

23.

*serve the younger.* And finally, that noted passage, *Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*, speaks only of the distinction which God, in his providence, made between the race of *Jacob* and *Esau*, with respect to *temporal* and *outward* advantages. For the words, of which *St. Paul* quotes only the general substance, stand thus in the prophet *Malachi*; *I have loved you, saith the Lord, yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau; — but how! — and laid his mountains and his heritage waste.*

*Mal. i. 2,*  
3.

Having sufficiently answered the first objection, the apostle comes to another, verse the 14th. *What shall we say then? is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.* “Is it any injustice in God to “choose one people before another, to “confer upon them extraordinary favours? By no means.” This he argues, with the *Jews*, from several passages in their own Scriptures: And in the

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the text, and some following verses, (up-SERM.  
on which I shall give you the excellent V.  
paraphrase of the great Mr. Locke) he argues the same point from the reason of the thing. *Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, "Shall the nations that are made great, " or little, shall kingdoms that are raised, " or depress'd, say to him in whose " hands they are to dispose of them as " he pleases," Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour? What if God willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured, with much long suffering, the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction? And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory? " What if God willing to " punish the sinful people of the Jews, " and to do it so as to have his power " known, and taken notice of in the doing " it, bore with them a long time, even " after*



SERM. "after they had deserved his wrath, as

V. "he did with *Pharaoh*, that his hand  
 ~~~~~ "might be the more eminently visible  
 "in their destruction? And that also
 "at the same time he might, with the
 "more glory, make known his goodness
 "and mercy to the *Gentiles*, whom, ac-
 "cording to his purpose, he was in a
 "readiness to receive into the glorious
 "state of being his people under the
 "gospel?"

I hope it appears, from what has been said, that this whole chapter, which has been so confounded and darkened, relates only to God's dealings with *nations* and *collective bodies* of men; and not to his favour or displeasure towards *particular persons*, and determining absolutely, without any regard to their actions, their *eternal state* hereafter. The argument then, that St. *Paul* pursues, is only this, that God might dispense his *extraordinary* favours as he saw fit; and, consequently, eminently distinguish one nation, and pass by others, without the least *injustice*; and that to censure such a way of proceeding, in
 the

the *proprietor* and *sovereign disposer* of all SERM. things, was arrogant and presumptuous. V.

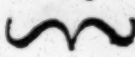
And from hence we learn, to what questions the words of the text may be *properly* and *justly* applied, *viz.* to such as these; — why God vouchsafes a revelation of his will to *some* nations, and not to *others*? — why, for example, he has not made the christian *universal*? — why does he permit *moral*, and *natural* evil? — why has he not made all creatures of the *highest order*, and communicated to all *equal degrees* of perfection and happiness? nothing of this can be shewn to be contrary to justice, because they are, all, favours, which his creatures have no right to *claim*: And therefore in these, and all other cases of a *like* nature, where justice is not concerned; which have no appearance of *malice* or *cruelty*, but are considerations of *wisdom* only; 'tis very *pertinent* and *rational* to say to an objector, *nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?* We learn from this discourse,

1st. How necessary 'tis that we consider the *uses* to which passages of scripture

SERM. ture are applied, and don't argue *generally*
 V. from what is only adapted to a *particu-*
 lar case. This is one reason why texts
 have been so abominably perverted, and
 strained to such *absurd* and *unnatural*
 senses, as are not only contrary to their
 true design, and the general scope and
 tenor of the revelation, but strike at the
 foundation of all religion.

2dly. Let us cultivate in our minds
 the highest reverence of God, especially
 the most honourable apprehensions of his
moral character; and being persuaded that
 all his counsels are the result of *infinite*
wisdom, and that his will is ever deter-
 mined by the *highest reason*, let us hum-
 bly acquiesce in all the methods of his
 providence. Survey the work of God,
 the exquisite beauty and harmony of
the whole, the admirable connection and
 subserviency of *the several parts*; nay
 survey *thy own frame*, the curious and
 astonishing structure of thy body, the no-
 ble faculties and capacities of thy mind;
 and from the surprizing marks of wis-
 dom and goodness, which thou canst
distinctly

God not an arbitrary being. 125

distinctly perceive, in *thine own make*, and SERM.
in the *whole constitution* of things, draw V.
the just and natural inference, *viz.* that 
the great author and governour of the
universe is possesst of these perfections in
the most *absolute* and *compleat* manner;
and, consequently, that all things are
contrived and ordered with the same
wise and *benevolent* view; tho', in parti-
culars, it does not appear *equally*, and in
some, perhaps, *not at all* to thy limited
understanding.

The improving constantly in our minds
worthy notions of God, as a being su-
preremely *wise*, and immutably *just* and
good, will be attended with very great
advantages.—— It will restrain that im-
pertinent humour of *scepticism* and *cavil-
ling*, which makes men oppose their ig-
norance and prejudices to his infinite
wisdom. —— We shall always consider the
Deity, as the most *amiable* and *delightful*
object of our contemplation; neither as
a weak capricious being, whom we can-
not *reverence*; nor as a rigid tyrannical
being, whom we cannot *love*. —— And,
I 2 finally,

SERM. finally, our religion, built on such principles, will be *wise* and *rational*; and there can be no foundation for any of those *superstitious* and *enthusiastic* mixtures, which expose the most excellent and useful thing in the world to *contempt* and *ridicule*.





SERMON VI.

Of the abuses of free-thinking.

GALAT. V. 13.

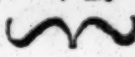
*For, brethren, ye have been called
unto liberty, only use not liberty
for an occasion to the flesh.——*

 HERE is not a more valuable blessing in human life, VI. than *liberty*. *Civil liberty* is the basis of all social happiness; and *liberty of conscience* the only foundation of a rational religion. When this latter is restrain'd, we are treated rather like *brutes* than men *i. e.* creatures
I 3 endued

SERM. endued with moral powers, and ac-

VI. countable for their actions: And there-
 fore 'tis one of the chief excellencies of the
 Christian religion, and very far from the
 air and spirit of an *imposture*, that it pre-
 serves the rights of conscience sacred and
 inviolable. But because the world is
 apt to run into *extremes*, the writers of
 the New Testament, like persons who
 had a thorough knowledge of human na-
 ture, have taken care in this respect,
 as well as in all others, to guard a-
 gainst *excess* and *irregularity*. Thus St.
Paul, in the text, advises the *Galatians*
 not to mistake *licentiousness* for Chris-
 tian liberty; or, in other words, not to
 imagine, that because they were freed
 from the expensive, and burthensom ob-
 servances of the *Mosaic* institution, which
 are elegantly described as a state of *ser-
 vitude*, they were discharg'd, likewise,
 from moral obligations, which are an
 eternal and immutable law to all rational
 beings. I intend to consider the subject
 in a different light, suited to the com-
 plection and genius of the *present age*;
 and

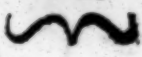
Of the abuses of free-thinking. 129

and shall enquire into some of the chief SERM.
abuses of *free-thinking*, by which, it hap- VI.
pens, that what is really the peculiar 
honour, and greatest *advantage* of our in-
telligent nature, becomes a *reproach* to it,
and is attended with most *injurious* con-
sequences. And,

1st. Embracing the principle of liber-
ty has ended, with many, in *infidelity*, or
a disbelief of all religion. 'Tis most evi-
dent, that infidelity never more abounded
than in this age of *free-enquiry*; and
that those who are most loose in their
sentiments with respect to the obliga-
tions of religion in general, and of
Christianity in particular, are, in pro-
fession at least, enemies to *bigotry* and
implicit faith: Nay, it may be allowed
farther, that 'tis likely they would never
have gone such a length as to throw off
all religion, if they had continued in a
blind attachment to the principles of
their education, and to established and po-
pular opinions.—— Whence now can
this arise?—— We who believe that re-
ligion, in all the parts of it, is strictly
I 4 rational,

130 *Of the abuses of free-thinking.*

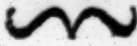
SERM. rational, can never allow that it is the natural consequence of a *free* and *impartial* examination of it; but must suppose, on the contrary, that the more thoroughly 'tis consider'd, and the more nicely weighed in the ballance of true and unbiaſſed reason, it will be the more heartily believed and submitted to: And I doubt not but I ſhall be able to make it appear, that this melancholy event may be ſufficiently accounted for from other cauſes; and that it not only may, but oftentimes does proceed, not from a *ſuperior underſtanding*, or more *adequate* and *enlarged views* of things, but from *ignorance*, *ſuperficial enquiry*, and even from that *prejudice*, and *implicit faith*, which the monopolizers of reason and free-thinking ſo loudly diſclaim. I would not be thought, by any thing I am now advancing, to diſcourage the moſt rational and free examination of all religious principles, be they ever ſo *ſacred*, and *venerable*, and tranſmitted down with ever ſo much *awe* and *ſolemnity* by our forefathers; nor would I be thought to aſſert,

assert, that any man is oblig'd to receive SERM.
a revelation, which, upon mature deli- VI.
beration, appears to be unworthy of God, 
and repugnant to the reason and na-
ture of things: For my only design is
to point out some false principles which
are all *an abuse* of the true principle
of liberty; and by which, 'tis highly pro-
bable, many of the *profess'd admirers*,
and *zealous espousers* of it, have been led
to a disregard both of *revealed*, and *na-*
tural religion. And,

1st. It frequently happens, that after
men have *rejected* some principles, which,
before, they looked upon as very im-
portant, nay essential parts of Christianity,
upon being convinced that they have as
little foundation in the Christian revela-
tion, as in the reason of things, they still
retain others, equally repugnant both to
reason, and scripture. In some time they
are persuaded, either by conversation,
reading, or their own inward reflec-
tions, that these likewise are *absurd*
and *irrational*; but instead of *enquiring*,
as becomes honest searchers after truth,
take it for granted, all the while, that
they

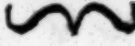
132 *Of the abuses of free-thinking.*

SERM. they are real doctrines of Christianity :

VI. The consequence of which is, that the
 Christian religion itself is rejected as false, because such doctrines, which are erroneously reckoned as parts of it, cannot be true. Thus, for instance, a man reasons that God can't be an arbitrary being, who has no regard to the moral fitness of things; or an ill natured being, who, purely for the ostentation of his uncontrollable power and sovereignty, has absolutely determined the final misery and ruin of great numbers of his reasonable creatures; that no miracles can prove such doctrines to be from God, because they are a dishonour to his moral perfections; and, consequently, no religion that teaches and inculcates them, whatever its external attestations are, can be of divine authority: But they pass, *among many*, for important principles of the Christian religion, and therefore Christianity is an *imposture*.

— But why? May not Christians *misrepresent* the doctrines of the religion which they profess? — Or is it
 fit

Of the abuses of free-thinking. 133

fit that any religion should be condemned, SERM.
before 'tis examin'd, merely from *hear-* VI.
say? — Is this *freedom of thought*, and 
rational enquiry? — Far from it. 'Tis
rank prejudice under the cover of that
amiable name, and a prejudice, which if
it was suffer'd to prevail in all cases,
would render it impossible for men to
form a right judgment of things, and
leave no way, by which to distinguish
between *true* and *false religions*: For
at this rate, there is nothing so extrava-
gant but may be charg'd upon the *best*
and most *unexceptionable* scheme in the
world, as easily as upon the *worst*; and
it will not be in the power of God
to make a revelation to his intelligent
creatures, that may not be rejected, tho'
it be ever so *excellent* in itself, and brings
with it the *highest* and *noblest* creden-
tials.

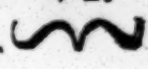
Again, when men, upon a rational
and free enquiry, have found *some* of the
principles in which they were educated,
and in whose favour they had been a
long time prepossessed, to be false; instead
of

134 *Of the abuses of free-thinking.*

SERM. of resting here, they draw this most *un-*

VI. *just* and *unnatural* inference, that the
 whole of religion is deceit and imposture. Because they are convinced that *some* doctrines, which they had formerly an high opinion of, are absurd and irrational, therefore *all revelation* must be disgraced and vilified: And if they have any instances of the *corruptions of Priests*, and of their design to enslave mankind, in order to advance their secular dominion, and serve their ambition, and worldly interest by the ignorance and credulity of the common people, tho' at the expence of the eternal and immutable obligations of morality and virtue, (of which, to the *reproach* of our holy religion, examples have been but too frequent) presently Christianity itself is nothing but *Priest-craft*; the invention of *designing* men to keep the world *in awe*, and, by an artful management of their consciences, to *pick their pockets*, and *plunder their estates*. Thus they rush *at once* to a conclusion, without having any premises that will support it; and draw consequences from things that have no *relation*

Of the abuses of free-thinking. 135

tion to, or *connection* with each other; SERM.
and yet, all this while, set up for VI.
close reasoners, and *free enquirers*! — 
Never, surely, was the name of *rational liberty* so grossly abused! For such a conduct as this, this way of believing upon no foundation at all, and concluding that because one thing is false, another, which is absolutely distinct from it, is so likewise, argues a very *shallow* judgment, great *confusion* of thought, and strong *prejudice*.

Another abuse of the principle of liberty is this, that some men seem to think, that because they have a right to reject all pretended principles of religion, which are contrary to reason, to the perfections of the supreme being, and the eternal laws of piety and virtue, they may likewise, throw off the belief of every thing that they can't fully account for; and are no more oblig'd, for example, to believe a providence, because the visible course of things is perplex'd and intricate, full of disorder and seeming injustice, and not
such,

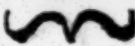
136 *Of the abuses of free-thinking.*

SERM. such as they imagine it would be, if

VI. the universe was govern'd by an absolutely wise and good being; than they are to receive such doctrines as assert that God is a rigorous, severe, and inexorable sovereign, one that delights in the misery of his creatures, &c. and destroy the necessary and unalterable distinction between moral good and evil. This, I say, is another too *common abuse* of the principle of liberty, leading to a disbelief even of the first principles of natural religion; an abuse that argues great *narrowness* of mind, and is what persons of any *compass* and *freedom* of thought can't be guilty of.

They are only *little understandings* that are inclin'd to be *prophane* and *atheistical*, from their ignorance of particular events in the course of providence; whilst those of a more *refined genius*, and the *nicest observation*, always abound in such reflections as these. "We can't describe the thousandth part of the beauty, and much less of the usefulness, of the *minutest* work of the
" great

Of the abuses of free-thinking. 137

“ great Creator, and shall we pretend SERM.
“ to arraign and censure the *whole course* VI.
“ of his providential government? As 
“ far as we *understand* of *nature*, all the
“ parts of it appear to be contrived and
“ formed to the utmost advantage; e-
“ very thing has its proper use, and no-
“ thing is superfluous or defective. And
“ as far as we *understand* of *providence*,
“ all its operations are in admirable
“ wisdom, and with the most kind and
“ benevolent design. And is not this a
“ reasonable presumption, that what ap-
“ pears *confused* and *intricate* to us is
“ perfectly harmonious and beautiful,
“ wise, just and good? This is certainly
“ the most *natural conclusion* we can
“ make, if we consider the narrow com-
“ pass of the human understanding, and
“ the *scantiness* of its most extended
“ knowledge; that we can't compre-
“ hend the *whole* scheme of God's go-
“ vernment, and, consequently, may ea-
“ sily err in judging of *particular* pro-
“ vidences; and that there must, of ne-
“ cessity, be some things, in the trans-
“ actions

138 *Of the abuses of free-thinking.*

SERM. "actions of an *infinite* mind, unfathom-

VI. "able by *finite* reason." These will be
 the reflections of a *judicious* enquirer, who has any knowledge of *himself*, and of *nature*. And all such, on the other hand, are but vain *pretenders* to rational freedom, who presume to measure *all things* by the standard of their imperfect reason, and will admit nothing to be true, if they can't solve *every difficulty* that attends it; not even that God governs the world, if he does it in a way above their *conceptions*, i. e. in other words, in a way, in which ignorant and fallible men could not, *themselves*, direct and manage the affairs of it. Such persons, I say, are but vain *pretenders* to free enquiry, which necessarily supposes, as the foundation of it, a *modest* temper of mind, conscious of its own weakness and imperfection; and as it prompts us to examine all things, that are within the *sphere* of our knowledge, with care and impartiality, to reject as false whatever is contrary to plain and certain principles of reason, and embrace nothing as true,

true, but upon proper evidence; so it SERM.
always restrains from passing a judgment, VI.
or determining concerning the truth or
falshood of things, about which we have
no ideas, and which are beyond the *reach*
of our present faculties. For all judg-
ments and decisions of this kind, which
are *above* our understandings, and conse-
quently can have no rational foundation
to support them, are not only the height
of *enthusiasm*, but the utmost pitch of
vanity and *arrogance*.

Some, again, seem to mistake *liberty*
for a right to *dispute every thing*, and
cavil at all religious principles, which are
commonly received, merely to shew that
they are *free thinkers*. The great delight
of these people, who are often to be
met with, is to puzzle a controversy, and
start objections against some point or o-
ther of revealed religion; not from a
desire of having them *considered* and *solv-*
ed; but, either to shew their *parts*, or
for the sake of embarrassing and di-
stressing weak minds, who having, per-
haps, neither capacity, nor leisure for
K close

SERM. close thinking, can't see thro' the fo-

VI. phistry of their pretended arguments:
 Such persons are, generally speaking, the farthest that can be from *freedom* and *largeness* of mind: For either they will not stay to hear their objections confuted, which is the least that can be expected from a *candid* and *ingenuous* spirit; or, if they are gravelled and confounded, make a shift to forget it soon, and repeat the same empty cavils over again, to the next company they meet, with as much unconcernedness and assurance as if they had never received any answer to them. Whether these men are, really, in *sentiment* against religion, or whether they dispute only for their *diversion*, or from a *talkative* humour, or an odd affectation of an *uncommon* spirit of liberty, I will not take upon me to determine. However this be, they can't take it amiss if they are ranked on the side of *infidelity*, because they are always talking against religion, but never defending it.

Indeed

Of the abuses of free-thinking. 141

Indeed every one has an undoubted SERM.
right to debate, in his mind, upon all VI.
principles before he receives them, whe-
ther they are true or false; and no wise
man will take up any opinion *implicitly*,
how powerfully soever it may be recom-
mended by *great names*, and *worldly ad-
vantages*. But disputing only for the
fake of *cavilling* is not an *honest* and *inge-
nuous* frame of mind, but *humour*, *pride*
and *singularity*. And, yet, every one that
knows the world must see, that this prac-
tice very much abounds, especially a-
mongst those, who, for want of judgment,
have carried their *free-thinking* to such
an unreasonable height, as, because they
have found some notions, which they
once thought parts of christianity, to be
false, to believe that there is no principle
in it true.

Let me add, that when men are be-
come thus loose in their regards to re-
veal'd religion, their *vanity* may put them
upon striking out *new schemes*, in order
to render themselves *considerable*.

142 *Of the abuses of free-thinking.*

SERM. There is a strong itch in mankind

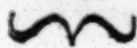
VI. after *fame*, especially to be thought eminent for qualities that are *highly esteemed*, as arguments of a *great* and *generous* mind: And this may easily be supposed to be the spring of some mens opposition to the principles of revelation, because they are ever full of it; and solicitous only to urge difficulties, and not at all to offer what may be said in its vindication. They think, perhaps, by this means, to pass for persons whose understandings are enlarged from vulgar prejudices, and who, in their pursuits after knowledge, are under no bias; not influenced by custom, human authority, established and popular opinions, nor by any consideration but the abstract reason and truth of things. And when they have raised plausible objections, and urged them for some time, tho' at first, perhaps, they had no design to hurt christianity by them, yet their thoughts being continually turned against it, and never employed in its defense, they may come at last to think that their objections

Of the abuses of free-thinking. 143

objections have some weight; and by SERM. degrees, to imagine that they are more VI. and more important; and in the end, that they are of sufficient strength to overthrow the christian religion, and prove it an imposture. — And thus what was, at first, only *vanity*, may, by degrees, be confirmed and settled *infidelity*. — And, to forward this melancholy effect, several other circumstances may concur. The *opposition* such persons frequently meet with will make them more eager in opposing, more tenacious of what they have advanced, and inclined to maintain it: It will put them upon *strengthening* their objections as much as possible; upon finding out *new salvos* to remove the difficulties that lie in their way; and more subtle *quirks* and *evasions*, whereby to render the positive evidences of the truth of christianity weak and inconclusive. — Till what they asserted and urged, for a long time, only for *cavilling* sake, or from *the spirit of contradiction* that is too natural to eager disputants, they think

SERM. themselves obliged *in honour* to stand by,

VI. as their own *genuine* sentiments.



I shall conclude this head with observing, that there are many who profess a great value and zeal for free and impartial enquiry into religious opinions, and perhaps know something, in *general*, of the reasonableness and excellency of it, and yet have but a confused notion of the *principle itself*, and understand very little either of its *true nature*, or *extent*; and others, who admire it merely because 'tis espoused by those, whom they esteem as the more *ingenious* and *sensible* part of mankind. Both these, therefore, are likely to follow, *implicitly*, such whom they regard as the greatest *patrons* and *defenders* of liberty: And, consequently, if in the circle of their acquaintance, it happens to be the character of an enlarged and generous spirit, not only to take nothing upon trust, but to question and dispute the truth of every thing that is generally looked upon as a sacred principle of religion; they are in danger of mistaking *Scepticism*

cism and cavilling for rational and im-
partial freedom of thought. For ha-
ving no fixed sentiments of their own,
there is no way left them but to follow
the example of the most *noted free-think-*
ers, to believe just *as much* as they do,
and *no more*; — and this, whether it
be *any thing*, or *nothing*, is liberty. —
Thus may *liberty* be made to stand for
bigotry and *implicit faith*; — an im-
partial examination into the nature
and evidences of religion may signify
having no religion at all; — and men
may assume the character of being open
to conviction, and free honest searchers
after truth, who are *indolent* and *make*
no enquiry.

2. Another abuse of the principle of
liberty is this, that it has led many,
who have not proceeded so far as a
downright disbelief of all religion, to
pay no regard, or at most, but a slight
and trifling regard, to *instrumental* and
positive duties. Impartial enquirers into
things have discovered the folly and
mischievous consequences of *superstition*,

146 *Of the abuses of free-thinking.*

SERM. and *enthusiasm*; that *reading, hearing,*
 VI. *praying, &c.* can answer no valuable
 ~~~~~ purposes, farther than as they influence  
 men to govern their passions, and be-  
 have with justice and universal bene-  
 volence to their fellow creatures; and  
 that placing the whole of religion in  
*inward impulses, a warm and lively ima-*  
*gination, and heats and raptures of devo-*  
*tion,* has been of vast disservice to the  
 cause of solid and useful virtue. And,  
 undoubtedly, so far our rational and free  
 enquiries have been of great use to us,  
 by teaching us wherein the substance  
 of true religion consists, and guarding  
 against dangerous errors.

But from hence it has been inferred,  
 that the *instrumental* duties of piety are  
 not only *unnecessary,* but *hurtful*; and  
 that an inward veneration and esteem  
 of the Deity, improved by frequent and  
 serious meditation, is sufficient, without  
 any outward stated acts of worship, and  
 all that is fit for us to perform, or our  
 maker to expect.—But how does this  
 follow? — Is it a just conclusion, that  
 because

*Of the abuses of free-thinking.* 147

because *superstition* and *enthusiasm* are SERM.  
mischievous things, therefore a *rational* VI.  
*devotion*, that is allowed to have no  
goodness in it but as 'tis subservient to  
moral purposes, can't be helpful to us  
in the pursuit of virtue? By no means.  
There is not the least *colour* of rea-  
son in it, nor can there be a more  
*forced* and *unnatural* inference: For *sta-*  
*ted* and *solemn* addresses to God have  
a direct tendency to fix, in our minds,  
an habitual reverence of his perfections,  
a strong sense of our necessary depen-  
dence upon him, and continual obliga-  
tions to him. And these ends are likely  
to be more effectually served by our  
making *immediate applications* to the su-  
preme being, (in which we have the  
awe of his omniscience a witness to our  
most secret thoughts, and of his almighty  
power that can dreadfully punish dis-  
simulation and falshood, to restrain us  
from carelessness and levity) than by our  
*loose, occasional, and cursory* reflections.  
There is, moreover, this undeniable ad-  
vantage arising from *public* and *social*  
worship,

148 *Of the abuses of free-thinking.*

SERM. worship, that it preserves in the world  
 VI. a general sense of a Deity, and a pro-  
 ~~~~~ vidence, and of the grand obligations of  
 religion.

Again, our reason, upon an impartial enquiry into the nature of things, will inform us, that *moral* duties are infinitely preferable to those of a *positive* and *ritual* nature; because the former are essentially good, and of eternal immutable authority in all ages, and under every dispensation of religion; whereas the latter are required with this view, that they may be subservient to these, and, consequently, are only so far valuable, as they answer this their ultimate end; and may be changed and varied as circumstances alter, and according to the particular genius and necessities of different ages and nations.

But can it be concluded from hence, which seems to be the too prevailing humour of this free, inquisitive age, that *positive* duties deserve *no* regard from us?
 ——— Are they to be *entirely* neglected, because *moral* precepts are of prior obligation,

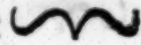
Of the abuses of free-thinking. 149

igation, and superior excellence? To SERM. VI.
say this, is, in effect, to assert that one thing can't be *good* because another is better; and because that other is *more useful*, this can be of *no service* at all. In truth, besides that 'tis an *eternal* rule of right, that God should be obey'd in every discovery of his will, whether it relates to things of a *positive*, or *moral* nature; besides this, I say, the *positive* duties of our holy religion have a natural aptitude to strengthen and enforce *moral* obligations, and for that reason, ought to be highly valued by us. So that the notion of the *absolute insignificance* of instrumental and instituted religion is as much an extreme, as the making the *chief part* of virtue and true goodness to consist in it; and both proceed, in a great measure, from the same principle, *viz. a slight judgment, and superficial enquiry.* And the *ill effects* of this notion are too visible. For those who have neglected all *external* religion, have been so far from improving, as might reasonably be expected since they profess

SERM. profess to have nothing else to mind,
 VI. that, except in a few instances, they
 rather decline in their zeal for the practice of that *moral* virtue, which they are so forward to magnify to the *utter disparagement* of every thing else; they have, I say, rather declin'd in their zeal for the practice even of *moral* virtue, in proportion as they have grown cold and remiss with respect to the *solemn worship* of their maker, and the *instrumental* duties of piety.

3dly. Freedom of thought, and impartial enquiry into the principles of religion, have been *abused* and *perverted*, in the present age, by degenerating into a *light trifling* frame of mind, and a humour of treating sacred things with *ridicule*. With people who affect this way, liberty is nothing else but a *free bold* manner of treating all subjects *ludicrously*, and turning them into a jest. They have a great inclination to shew their *wit*, especially upon points that afford the *least room* for it; for this discovers an *uncommon* genius: And, therefore,

Of the abuses of free-thinking. 151

therefore, because religion is the *gravest* SERM.
thing in the world, they resolve to be VI.
merry with it; and think it a most 
meritorious action to laugh at what the
generality of the world esteem and re-
verence, and endeavour to put all the
wise and *virtuous* part of mankind out of
countenance. But such *empty triflers* ought
to know, that there can be no true wit
which has not *reason* for the founda-
tion of it; that ridiculing what is in
itself *good, useful, and venerable*, fixes a
certain reproach upon him that attempts
it, either upon his *understanding*, or his
morals; that jesting with things of the
highest consequence is *folly* and *madness*;
that 'tis an easy matter, by *misrepres-*
enting, to make any thing appear ridicu-
lous; and consequently, that this talent
is so far from being a demonstration
that the person who possesses it is a
wit, as 'tis from being an evidence of
his good breeding, that, in violation of
all the rules of *decency*, he banters and
treats with *scurrility* the established re-
ligion of his country, and that which
all

152 *Of the abuses of free-thinking.*

SERM. all around him have a high value for.

VI. But I hasten to a conclusion.

From what has been said we learn, that there are no things in themselves so excellent, but what are capable of being *abus'd*; and be their natural consequences ever so friendly and beneficial to mankind, may be made to produce the most mischievous effects. This possibility of the corruption of what is most wise and good necessarily results from the principle of liberty, which God hath planted in human nature; which, at the same time, that it supposes, that 'tis in a man's power to *improve* his faculties, and the advantages he enjoys, must suppose, that 'tis in his power, likewise, so to *darken* his judgment by wilful *negligence*, and want of *consideration*, and giving an unbounded scope to *sensual* and *irregular* passions, as to confound the very plain and unalterable distinction that there is, in the nature of things, between truth and falsehood, and between moral good and evil. And as this great and melancholy

Of the abuses of free-thinking. 153

choly abuse is no just objection to the SERM.
wisdom and *goodness* of the Creator, so VI.
neither is it any argument against the
excellency and *usefulness* of the things
themselves; any more than 'tis an argu-
ment against the *necessary supports* of life,
that they are frequently abused to ex-
cess and intemperance; or against *reason*
itself, that 'tis sometimes employed to
undermine the foundations of religion
and virtue, to give false and plausible
colours to vice and immorality, and in
contriving such schemes of injustice,
fraud, and tyranny, as are subversive
of the peace and happiness of the world.
Indeed, strictly speaking, perverting the
nature of things, in every instance, is
nothing else but *an abuse of reason*; and
therefore, if it concludes any thing, it
must be against that *noble faculty*, which
is our chief dignity, and only superiority
to the animal creation. And we are to
consider farther, that the *real nature* of
things is not, in the least, altered by
our erroneous sentiments, or irregular
behaviour; and that, if we would form

154 *Of the abuses of free-thinking.*

SERM. a right judgment in any case, we must

VI. carefully distinguish between the *natural* tendency of a principle, and the evils it may *occasionally* produce, through the ignorance, prejudice, and wilful perverseness of mankind.

Thus, for instance, 'tis generally allowed, that *religion* is not, in itself, ever the less *amiable* or *useful*, for having been so horribly corrupted and deformed, as to make it questionable, whether under some of the worst *depravations* of it, it has not been quite as bad as no religion at all. The matter of fact is uncontestable. It has been placed in *faith* and *outward profession*, in *idle ridiculous* ceremonies, *absurd* and *unintelligible* doctrines, in a *slavish submission* to the dictates of cunning and designing men, and even in such a *blind raging* and *injurious* zeal, as has prompted bigots and enthusiasts, of all parties, to violate the great laws of justice and charity, which are of eternal and necessary obligation. Thus, instead of being represented as a *reasonable service*, it has been

Of the abuses of free-thinking. 155

been taught, in effect, that we must SERM.
become *brutes*, and renounce our *under-* VI.
standings, in order to be religious; and
that we must throw off humanity, all
regard to the immutable differences of
things, and the moral perfections of our
maker, in order to serve him *accept-*
ably.

In like manner, tho' the exercise of
free enquiry in matters of religion has
been grossly and shamefully abused, we
ought not, upon this account, to en-
tertain the *worse* opinion of the prin-
ciple itself, because it is, indeed, the
chief glory of our nature, and the very
end for which we were endued with
reason. For if the great Creator had de-
signed that we should submit *implicitly*
to established opinions, without examin-
ing and judging for our selves, rea-
son must not only be *impertinent* and
useless, but an *absurdity* and a *contradic-*
tion; since if we make any use of this
faculty, and follow its most plain and
natural directions, we can't suffer our-
selves to be *thus imposed on*. Again,
freedom

156 *Of the abuses of free-thinking.*

SERM. freedom of thought, and an honest im-

VI. partial examination into the nature and
 evidence of religious principles, is absolutely essential to a *rational* faith: For there can no more be true faith without *evidence*, than there can without *ideas*; or in other words, men deserve no more to be commended for believing an *intelligible* proposition they know not *why*, than they do for believing what they know *nothing at all* of; from whence it follows, that this liberty of judging for themselves is one of the most *sacred* and *unalienable* rights of mankind. To this we may add, that the exercise of it, in the *utmost latitude* of rational enquiry, without any corrupt prejudice to bias and mislead the understanding, any undue reverence of human authority, or attachment to party schemes, and indeed being influenced by nothing but plain reason and scripture, is the *only way* in which *truth* can revive; whereas without it, men must *necessarily* continue in their *errors* and *vices*, and there will not be

to

Of the abuses of free-thinking. 157

so much as *a possibility* of a reforma-SERM.
tion. Accordingly, in proportion as it VI.
has prevail'd, it has been of vast ser-
vice to the cause of Christianity, by
representing its doctrines in a more
consistent view, and establishing its au-
thority upon the *strongest* and most
unexceptionable evidence. And withal 'tis
a principle the most *honourable* that can
be to our holy religion, describing it
as recommending to men, with an
openness and frankness *peculiar to truth*,
the use and improvement of their ra-
tional faculties; and not only *inviting*
to, but *encouraging* the utmost freedom
of debate; because, as it has a good
foundation to support it, it can stand
the test of *sober* and *impartial* reason,
and receive no *real injury* by all the
skill and sophistry of its opposers. But
what a *disagreeable* and *unworthy* no-
tion does it give of Christianity, to re-
present it as raising its triumphs upon
the *ruins* of our rational nature, and
placing the substance of religion in *en-
thusiasm* and *implicit faith*; and, con-
sequently, as setting itself upon a level

158 *Of the abuses of free-thinking.*

SERM. with *impostures* and *false religions*, which
 VI. will not bear the light, and therefore
 always shelter themselves under the
 covert of ignorance and darkness.

Since then this principle is the *supreme prerogative* of our intelligent being, essential to all *rational* religion, and, in a peculiar manner, honourable and advantageous to the *Christian*; let us, notwithstanding *accidental abuses* (to which the best things are liable) constantly assert and vindicate it. And let us be sure ever to remember, that tho' we are *called to liberty*, both these rules have the same foundation in *reason*, and are of equal authority in the *Christian revelation*, *Stand fast in the liberty where-with Christ hath made you free; but use not your liberty for an occasion to the flesh.*



SERMON



SERMON VII.

Of Mysteries.

DEUTER. XXIX. 29.

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are reveal'd belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.



IN the beginning of this chapter, *Moses* exhorts the *Israelites* to be faithful to God, and constant in their obedience to his law, as the way to engage the

SERM.
VII.

SERM. the protection of providence, and make
 VII. them a prosperous and flourishing people. He, afterwards, denounces very severe judgments against them, if they revolted from the service of the true God, and imitated the corruption and wickedness of idolatrous nations; judgments in which the divine power and vengeance would be remarkably visible; so *exemplary* and *terrible*, that *all nations* should enquire into the cause of them, and say, *Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger?* To which it might be answered, that the reason why they were punished in so *signal* a manner was, that their iniquities were exceedingly aggravated; that they had sinned against a clear revelation of the will of God, and renounced their allegiance and duty to him, notwithstanding they were favoured with extraordinary and peculiar privileges: *They have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the*

Ver. 24.

the land of Egypt. For they went and SERM.
 served other Gods, and worshipped them; VII.
 Gods whom they knew not.—And the anger
 of the LORD was kindled against this
 land, to bring upon it all the curses that
 are written in this book. And the Lord
 rooted them out of their land in anger,
 and in wrath, and in great indignation,
 and cast them into another land, as it is
 this day. But because it might be ask'd Ver. 15.
 farther, why he interpos'd to bring such 26.
 grievous calamity and destruction upon
 them while he spared other very corrupt,
 idolatrous, and wicked nations, 'tis ad-
 ded in the words of the text, that we are
 not able, in innumerable cases, to fix
 the *precise reasons* of the divine conduct,
 and therefore should not *perplex* and
bewilder our selves with fruitless enqui-
 ries of this kind; *The secret things be-*
long unto the LORD our God, &c.

A very learned commentator supposes, 11. Le
 that there might be another question Clerc.
 started (besides that mentioned in the
 24th verse) of which we have no par-
 ticular account, *viz.* Whether the *Israel-*
ites would ever, in fact, become thus

SERM. degenerate, and bring themselves, by
 VII. their guilt, into such deplorable and
 dreadful circumstances; and that *Moses*,
 in the text, checks this *idle inquisitive*
 humour, which makes men anxious
 about futurity, and to be acquainted
 with events that don't concern them.
 But these things are not of much im-
 portance; for if we should not be able
 to fix to what it immediately refers, the
 text has, in general, an easy and obvious
 sense, and naturally suggests several use-
 ful things to be the subject of the en-
 suing discourse. As,

I. That 'tis a *vain and foolish curi-
 osity* to enquire into things that we
 can't comprehend, and with respect
 to which we have no light to direct
 us, either from reason, or revela-
 tion.

II. That there are, *properly speaking,*
no mysteries in religion. *The secret*
things belong unto the LORD our
God, and only *things reveal'd,* things
 that are plain and intelligible, *be-
 long to us.*

III. That

III. That the great end of revelation SERM.
is *practice*, the practice of solid and VII.
substantial virtue; *that we may do*
all the words of this law. From
whence it necessarily follows,

IV. That no doctrines, which, in the
least, encourage *immorality*, can be
parts of a divine revelation. And
in the

Fifth and last place, that the *import-*
tance of the several doctrines of
revelation is to be judged of by
this rule, *viz.* their tendency to
promote and establish a becoming
regard to *purity* and *true goodness*.

I. 'Tis a *vain* and *foolish curiosity* to
enquire into things that we can't com-
prehend, and with respect to which we
have no light to direct us, either from
reason, or revelation. Of this kind are
the *secret counsels* and *decrees* of God,
and *future events* in which we have no
manner of concern. There are many
truths that are necessarily hid from us,
and wrapp'd up in close *impenetrable*
darkness. Such is the narrowness and
limitation

SERM. limitation of our present faculties, that
 VII. we are ignorant of the end and uses of
 ~~~~~ innumerable things in the *constitution* of  
*nature*; and particular events in the *con-*  
*duct* of *providence* confound and puzzle  
 us, because we have but very loose and  
 imperfect conceptions of its whole design.  
 And yet the *pride* of man would grasp at  
 every thing. It sets itself to judge, or ra-  
 ther to make childish and groundless *con-*  
*jectures* where it knows nothing; takes  
 it amiss that the All-wise creator has not  
 condescended to reveal to it all his *secrets*;  
 and can't persuade itself to use and im-  
 prove the knowledge it *has*, for the un-  
 easiness it feels, and its impatient and  
 eager desire after what it *has not*. Such  
 a temper as this is very *perverse* and *un-*  
*reasonable*. For 'tis certainly the *true wis-*  
*dom* of mankind (as there are bounds  
 set to the human understanding, beyond  
 which it cannot pass) to pursue those  
 truths which are within the reach of  
 their faculties, and digest and cultivate  
 that useful knowledge which is of the  
 highest importance to them; and to be  
 thankful that their rational powers are of  
 so

so large a compass and extent; and most SERM.  
VII.  
*unaccountable folly* to delight to grope in the dark; to leave the plain dictates of reason, and follow the wild roving of imagination and fancy; to attempt to argue where they have no principles to proceed upon, and unravel inexplicable mysteries; and to repine at not being omniscient, or able to comprehend all the designs of an infinite mind.

Our blessed Saviour discourag'd this idle, trifling curiosity upon all occasions, and very wisely; because it naturally leads to *scepticism* and *cavilling*, and diverts the mind from a pursuit of solid wisdom, to *amusing* and *useless* speculations. Thus when one (who was only concern'd in the solution of that grand question, what HE should *do to be sav'd*) came and enquir'd of him, *Lord, are there few that be sav'd?* instead of giving a direct answer, which would have humoured this spirit of *impertinence*, he instructed the multitude what was their proper business, and most important interest: *Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many will seek to enter in, and* <sup>Luke viii. 23, 24</sup>  
*shall*

SERM. *shall not be able.* Other instances might be  
 VII. alledged to the same purpose, but this  
 is sufficient to show, that, in the judgment of this divine teacher, such enquiries were vain and unprofitable, and argued a *light unsteady* temper, and a mind intent upon *trifles*, instead of being desirous of that useful knowledge which is suited to its faculties, and has an immediate influence upon its happiness. Let it therefore be our chief care to make a right improvement of what we do know of the plain directions of our reason, and the extraordinary light that is afforded us by divine revelation; and let us not aspire after things out of our reach, and so neglect the substance, and hunt after shadows. Let us upon the evidences we have which are very numerous and uncontestable, and of the utmost force with every considerate mind let us, I say, upon the evidences we have of the unerring wisdom, inflexible justice, and most perfect goodness of the great author and governor of the universe, acquiesce, without murmuring, in all his disposals, and entertain an honourable opinion of all the  
 method



methods of his providence: In this our SERM.  
 reason will *assist* us; so far the inference VII.  
 is *easy* and *natural*. But in attempting   
 to account for every thing, and trace  
 out the whole scheme of God's providen-  
 tial operations, we assume a task that is  
 far above our *capacities*, and *disquiet* our-  
 selves *in vain*. We may *imagine*, and *guess*,  
 and indulge a thousand little groundless  
*fancies*, but shall find it impracticable, in  
 numberless cases, to form *just* and *certain*  
 conclusions.

The 2d observation from the text is,  
 that there are, properly speaking, *no*  
*mysteries* in religion. *The secret*, i. e. the  
 mysterious *things*, belong *unto the LORD*  
*our God*; and only *things reveal'd*, things  
 that are plain and intelligible, belong *to us*.  
 A *mystery*, in the scripture sense of it, is  
 a thing that natural reason could not dis-  
 cover, and, consequently, which must  
 have been unknown, if God had not re-  
 veal'd it: And of this kind, I own, there  
 are several doctrines in the Christian reli-  
 gion; before the revelation was given  
 they were mysteries; but cease to be mys-  
 teries now they are reveal'd. According-  
 ly

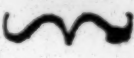
SERM. M. ly Christ says to his disciples, that unto  
 VII. them it was *given* to know the mystery  
 of the kingdom of God. Again, St. Paul  
 speaks of the revelation of the mystery  
 which was kept secret since the world be-  
 gan; and to the *Corinthians*, Behold I  
 shew you a mystery. All which passages evi-  
 dently imply, that how dark soever these  
 things were before, they are now plain  
 and intelligible, how else could they be  
 shewn, reveal'd, and known? And this  
 will appear more undeniably, if we con-  
 sider the things themselves. For what  
 can be more clear than the two *mysteries*  
 St. Paul speaks of, viz. preaching the  
 gospel to the *Gentiles*; and this proposi-  
 tion, *We shall not all sleep, or die, but*  
*we shall all*, i. e. those who are found  
 alive at the coming of Christ, *be chang'd*?  
 They could not have been known if they  
 had not been reveal'd, and, consequently,  
 before that time were *proper mysteries*;  
 but, in themselves, are *plain truths* a-  
 dapted to all understandings, and have  
 not the least *obscurity* or *intricacy* in them.  
 The same may be said of the *parable* of  
 the *sower*, which our saviour refers to;

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## Of Mysteries.

169

it was *a mystery of the kingdom of God*, SERM.  
while it was conceal'd and hid under a **VII.**  
dark parable; but afterwards so clear,   
that no man of common reflection could  
find any difficulty in it.

Now from this account 'tis most certain, that *mysteries*, i. e. things which reason cannot discover, and which are not reveal'd, are, in the language of the text, *the secret things that belong to God*, and what we have nothing at all to do with; or, in other words, tho' certain things are parts of our religion that *were* mysteries, 'tis not our duty to believe or practise any thing that is *still* a mystery. To believe doctrines that are *still* mysterious is to believe without *ideas*, to believe what we know nothing of; but this, in the nature of the thing, is *impossible*. We may, indeed, believe that there is *some general truth* contain'd in propositions which we don't understand, and so far our faith may be rational, because we know what we believe; but of the propositions themselves we can believe nothing *particularly* because we understand nothing: Nor can greater dishonour be done to the infinite wisdom



SERM. wisdom of God, than by supposing, that  
 VII. he has made it a part of our religious  
 obligations, only to believe, in general,  
 that there is some truth disguis'd under  
 unintelligible terms, to which we have  
 no ideas. For this is making no *revela-*  
*tion* at all, but leaving things in absolute  
*darkness*; 'tis only shewing men their own  
 ignorance, and perhaps may be look'd  
 upon as upbraiding and insulting them  
 with it, but affords no light by which  
 they may be directed to their duty and  
 happiness.

And if we examine the doctrines of the  
 Christian religion, we shall find in fact,  
 that they are plain and easy truths, and  
 that as we cannot in *reason*, we are not  
 oblig'd by *revelation*, to carry our faith  
 one jot beyond our understanding. —  
 “ That God made, and supports, and  
 “ governs the world, that he is eter-  
 “ nal, independent, unchangeable, per-  
 “ fectly wise, just and good ;” which are  
 fundamental truths of natural religion,  
 explain'd and enforc'd by christianity ;  
 “ that he sent his son into the world to  
 “ be the instructor and saviour of man-  
 “ kind,

“ kind ; that he has made him *Lord of* SERM.  
 “ *all*, and *will*, by him, *judge the world* VII.  
 “ *in righteousness* ; that all men shall be  
 “ rais’d at the great day with immortal  
 “ and incorruptible bodies ; the righte-  
 “ ous be rewarded with *eternal life*, and  
 “ the wicked punished with *everlasting*  
 “ destruction ;” these, likewise, which  
 are the peculiar principles of the gospel,  
 have nothing *abstruse* and *mysterious* in  
 them, but are express’d in the most *natu-*  
*ral* and *obvious* terms. If you say, that  
 you can’t account for the *manner* of God’s  
 creating the world, or for the *manner*  
 in which he exists every where, of the  
 general resurrection, and the like, I an-  
 swer, ’tis no part of your *religion* to ac-  
 count for it.—Where the mystery *be-*  
*gins*, religion *ends*.—For I would ask,  
 does the most warm and forward *enthu-*  
*siast* pretend to believe more than that  
 these things are true ? Does he believe  
 any thing at all with respect to the *man-*  
*ner* of them ? Nay, is not his urging that  
 ’tis mysterious and incomprehensible a  
 demonstration, that he, *himself*, knows,  
 M he

SER.M. he can believe nothing *particularly* about it?  
VII.

~~~~~ 'Tis yet more strange to talk of *mysterious precepts*, than of unintelligible doctrines; for laws that are not *understood*, 'tis most certain, can never be obey'd. What is design'd for a rule of action should be as plain as possible, and if it be intended for an universal rule, it must be adapted to the *lowest capacities* of mankind; and the enjoining *incomprehensible*, is the very same absurdity, and the same degree of injustice, as enjoining *impracticable* duties. Should it be ask'd, whether God may not command things, which we can't assign particular reasons for? I answer, that I very much question whether any of this kind can be produced from revelation; but if it could, the *command itself* would be no mystery, for then 'tis impossible it should be observ'd; it would, in truth, be a command to *doing nothing*; but the only mystery would be, *why God gave such a command*, which your religion had no manner of concern with.

'Tis indeed very surprizing, that mankind, in all ages, have been so *fond* of mysteries;

mysteries; that the *crafty* and *designing*, SERM. who make a gain of the credulity of the VII. multitude, should use all their art and interest to propagate them, is indeed natural enough; but why should the more *honest* and *disinterested* part of the people plead so zealously for them? Whence comes it to pass, that when they choose to see their way plain before them in all other cases, they should affect to be *without light* in matters of religion? Religion is of vastly greater importance than the common affairs of life, and this they readily acknowledge; and yet they seem to like it the *better*, the *less* they understand it. Such a conduct is very unaccountable, because there can, one would think, be no motive to it.—Mysteries yield neither *pleasure* nor *profit*. — For as, with respect to the works of *nature*, all our pleasure arises from the *perception* of beauty, harmony, and usefulness; and however we may imagine innumerable *secret* beauties which we have not discover'd, yet till they are *known* they afford no *real satisfaction*, nor can we reap any *advantage* from them; 'tis just the

SERM. same with respect to *mysteries* in religion;

VII. we can neither be delighted nor *profited* by them because we don't understand them, *i. e.* in other words they are really *nothing at all* to us.—Nay we can't so much as *admire* them; because admiration necessarily supposes, that we have a knowledge of the *grandeur*, or of the *worth* and *excellency* of the object. The utmost that can be said therefore is, that we are *confounded* and *puzzled*.—And is there any pleasure in that, or any advantage merely in being in *the dark*, and having *no ideas*?

However, if this were all, a man would only prove himself a *weak* (and might at the same time be an *innocent*) enthusiast, by supposing things that are, in truth, *nothing* to him, to be important parts of revelation. But when *mysteries* are propagated with zeal, and impos'd on conscience, when for the sake of what is allow'd to be *incomprehensible*, the plain and indispensable obligations of justice and charity are infring'd and violated, (of which the history of the Christian church, in almost every age, affords many flagrant examples)

examples) 'tis then our duty to oppose an SERM. VII.
 error which makes *religion* contemptible, and strikes at the foundation of *Christianity*, and, indeed, of all *good morals*.
 And this can't be so effectually done as by shewing that there are no mysteries in religion, and that of what we don't understand, we can't know whether it be good for any thing or no; 'tis in fact useless, and does not deserve our zeal; nor if we did understand it would that alone be sufficient, unless it was a doctrine of some importance to the cause of virtue, and the happiness of mankind, and consequently worthy of God. I shall only add, that there is a great difference between a *mystery*, and a direct *absurdity* and *contradiction*, such as *transubstantiation*, and other *doctrines* which have been screen'd under that more venerable name; for mysteries are only things that we know *nothing at all* of, the other things that we certainly know to be *false*;—the former we only *don't* understand, the latter we see *can't* be understood. But I proceed to

SERM. The 3^d observation, *viz.* that the great end of revelation is *practice*; the practice of solid and substantial virtue. *Those things which are reveal'd, says Moses, belong to us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.* The design of revelation, I have already shewn, could not be to *confound* the understandings of men with *deep* and *inexplicable* mysteries; for this, instead of giving a revelation to assist and instruct mankind, is only to bewilder them, and lead them into a maze; and it must be absolutely unbecoming the infinite wisdom of God, to be at the expence of miracles, and sending an extraordinary messenger from heaven, merely to *non-plus* and *puzzle* human reason, and make ignorant men *stare*. Again, it can't be thought to be the sole and ultimate view of revelation, to give right speculative notions of the most important principles, or furnish the understanding with just ideas even of *moral* truths; for what does the most excellent kind of knowledge signify if it be not digested, and reduced to its proper use? or how is it at all more valuable

valuable than *harmless error*, and a *pleasing* SERM.
VII.
delusion? Besides, men may be great pro-
ficients in the *theory* of religion, may un-
derstand it thoroughly, and be able to ar-
gue every part of it with an uncommon
acuteness, and *strength* of judgment, and
be not at all the wiser or the better for it;
they may, notwithstanding, be very *miser-*
able in themselves and *injurious* to others:

For even *the devils believe and tremble*. James ii.

But to aim at promoting and encouraging ^{19.}

the practice of virtue by a revelation, the
practice, I say, of universal, generous, and
godlike virtue, which is the perfection of
human nature, and inseparably connected
both with private and public happiness,
is a truly *noble* design, worthy the *greatest*
and *best* of characters, even that of the
All-wise governour, the supremely bene-
ficent and compassionate father of man-
kind: And that this is really the great
end proposed by the christian revelation,
must be allowed by all who have examin'd
it with any care, and will be seen the
more clearly, the more thoroughly it is
understood.

The greatest part of Christianity is
only *a reinforcement* of the religion of na-
ture,

SERMON. *ture*, consisting of *moral* precepts which

VII. were doubtless intended to be the rule of

our actions, and strengthening the arguments for a virtuous life which *reason* suggests: And if we consider its *peculiar* doctrines, we shall find that they are all calculated, wisely calculated to serve the same most excellent design of establishing moral obligations, and promoting universal purity. This, for instance, is the design of the *death* of Christ, and the *redemption* purchas'd for us *by his blood*; for

Tit. ii. 14. *he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works:*

—of his *resurrection*, and the hope that is thereby afforded us of a glorious resurrection to life and immortality; for if we

Col. iii. 1. *are risen with Christ, we ought to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; and to*

Phil. iii. 20, 21. *have our conversation in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashion'd like unto his glorious body.* — Again, the natural influence, and, consequently, the ultimate

end of the *promises* of the gospel is, *that*
by

by them we may be partakers of a divine SERMON
 nature, escaping the corruption that is in **VII.**
 the world through lust. Having these pro- 2 Pet. i. 4.
 mises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves 2 Cor. vii.
 from all filthiness of the flesh and of the¹
 spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of
 God. — And to mention no more, do
 we believe the doctrine of the universal
 judgment? When the Lord Jesus shall be 2 Thes. i.
 reveal'd from heaven, with his mighty an- 7-10.
 gels, in flaming fire, to take vengeance on
 them that know not God, and obey not the
 gospel; — and when he shall come to be
 glorified in his saints, and admir'd in all
 them that believe? — What manner of per- 2 Pet. iii.
 sons ought we, then, to be in all holy con- 11.
 versation and godliness? Is it not a most
 natural and forcible conclusion, that see- Ver. 14.
 ing we look for such things, we should be
 diligent that we may be found of him in
 peace, without spot and blameless?

And this, which must be the view of
 all divine revelations, and which the
 grand doctrines of Christianity have a
 peculiar tendency to promote, is besides
 expressly declar'd to be its chief design.
 All hopes of happiness, but what are built
 on purity of heart and a virtuous life, are,
 according

SERM. according to the Christian scheme, vain

VII. and delusory, and will certainly end in
 disappointment and confusion. — Dost
 thou expect to be saved by thy faith and
 outward profession? Hear what Christ

Matt. vii. himself says, *Not every one that saith unto*
 21. *me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the king-*
dom of heaven, but he that doth the will of

James ii. *my Father who is in heaven. What doth it*
 14—17. *profit, my brethren, saith St. James, tho'*
a man say he hath faith, and have not
works, can faith save him? If a brother
or sister be naked, and destitute of daily
food, and one of you say unto them depart
in peace, be ye warm'd, and fill'd, notwith-
standing ye give them not those things which
are needful to the body, what doth it pro-
fit? even so faith if it hath not works, is
dead being alone. — Or dost thou expect
 to be rewarded for a strong, warm and

1 Cor. xiii. lively zeal? *Tho' thou give thy body to be*
 3. *burned, and hast not charity, it profiteth*
nothing. — Church privileges are a vain
 security; — Nay, the outward appearance
 of some uncommon virtue, and even ex-
 traordinary gifts will not avail: For *tho'*

1 Cor. xiii. *I speak with the tongues of men and angels,*
 1, 2. *tho' I have the gift of prophecy, and un-*
derstand

Of Mysteries.

181

derstand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and tho' I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, I am nothing. Many, says our blessed saviour, will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? St. Luke adds, we have eaten and drank in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity. With these things exactly agree the general accounts we have of religion in the writings of the New Testament: The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.—Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life. — Pure religion and undefil'd before God, even the father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. — So that the sum of religion, under the gospel, is the same with what is very elegantly and strongly express'd by the prophet Micah, He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth

SERM.

VII.

Mat. vii.

22, 23.

Luke xiii.

26.

1 Cor. vi.

9. Rev. xxii.

14.

James i.

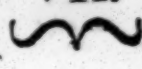
27.

Mic. vi. 8.

SERM. *doth the Lord require of thee, but to do*
 VII. *justly, and to love mercy, and to walk hum-*
 bly with thy God? From this head, viz.
 that the great end of revelation is *practice*,
 the practice of solid and substantial vir-
 tue, it necessarily follows,

4. That no doctrines, which in the least
 incourage *immorality*, can be parts of a di-
 vine revelation. — Doctrines of this kind
 can't be charg'd on christianity, which
 prescribes the noblest system of morals,
 without making it contradict itself. —
 Nor, in the nature of the thing, can they
 belong to any religion that is of divine
 original, because of the absolute wisdom,
 and spotless purity of the great governor
 of the world. — Even miracles themselves
 can't prove such doctrines to be true, which
 are *necessarily* false, dishonourable to the
 moral attributes of God, and inconsistent
 with the true perfection and happiness of
 mankind: But this point is so exceeding
 clear that I need not enlarge on it; and
 therefore,

In the last place, if the great end of
 revelation be to promote a good life, it is
 an undeniable consequence, that the im-
 portance of the several doctrines of it must
 be

be judged of by this rule, viz. their SERM.
tendency to establish a becoming regard to VII.
purity and virtue. And let any man ask 
himself seriously what those doctrines are;
whether they are not those *plain principles*
in which all good Christians are agreed;
and whether the most *celebrated controversies*,
which have produced so much confusion
and violence in the Christian world,
have not been about such things,
as have very *little*, if *any* connection
with practical religion?---Let him
ask himself of what use are disputes about
personalities, *subsistences*, the *hypostatical union*,
and other famous points which distract
the minds of the vulgar; and which the
learned themselves can't tell how to explain.
The scripture has none of these *dark*
phrases, but is a *plain intelligible* rule.
Let us therefore study *that* more, and
scholastic explications of it less, which have,
in many places, darkened the text, and
made difficulties where they *found* none.
And let us value our brethren, not for
being of the same side with us in matter
of *doubtful opinion*, and the *subtilities* of
controversial divinity, but for their *piety*,
justice, *charity*, and the fruits of *universal*
righteousness

SERMON. *righteousness* that appear in their conver-

VII. fations. I shall conclude this discourse with two passages of scripture. The one is from St. Paul's first epistle to Timothy:

1 Tim. vi. 3—5. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing; but doating about questions, and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: From such withdraw thyself. The other are the words of St. James: But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

SERMON

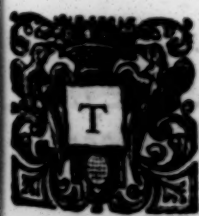


SERMON VIII.

Agur's prayer ; or the middle condition of life, generally, the most eligible.

PROV. XXX. Part of the 8th, and the whole 9th Verse.

—Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me : lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord ? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.



THESE words (as we are in-SERM. form'd in the first verse of the VIII. chapter) were spoken by *Agur* to *Ithiel* and *Ucal*, who, very probably, were two of his scholars, that came

SERM. came to him to be instructed in the
 VIII. principles of true wisdom: He be-
 gins with modestly declaring his own
 insufficiency for so great an undertak-
 ing, and recommends as the foundation
 of all useful knowledge, an *humble* tem-
 per of mind, sensible of the natural
 weakness of human understanding, and
 the imperfection of its highest improve-
 ments; which he argues, verse the 4th,
 from our ignorance of the works of na-
 ture: And therefore, in the two follow-
 ing verses, he advises his pupils to make
 it their principal study to understand *the*
will of God, which is, of all knowledge,
 the most important, and of the greatest
 use in human life; and in all their enqui-
 ries of this kind, to confine themselves to
 what God had *revealed*: Then he intro-
 duces the words of the text, in the form
 of an address to God, in answer, perhaps,
 to some question that they had propos'd
 to him about the duty of prayer: *Two*
things have I required of thee: Deny me
them not, before I die. Remove far from
me vanity and lies; give me neither pover-
ty nor riches, feed me with food conve-
nient

nient for me, (i. e. Allow me only to en-
 joy such a competency, as will enable me
 to live with decency and advantage to
 my fellow creatures, in that station in
 which I am placed,) *least I be full and*
deny thee, and say who is the Lord? or
least I be poor and steal, and take the name
of my God in vain.

In this passage 'tis plainly intimated,
 that the *middle* state of life is, generally
 at least, more safe and eligible than either
want or *superfluity*: With respect to its
 being better than *narrow* and *penurious*
 circumstances, there can be no dispute;
 but that it should be preferr'd to great
wealth and *abundance*, will, I am perswa-
 ded, appear a very wild and extravagant
 paradox to the giddy and unthinking,
 who judge of things at first sight, with-
 out enquiring into their nature, or consi-
 dering their consequences: For is it not a
 desirable thing, will such say, to be not
 only placed above poverty, and enjoy the
 necessaries and conveniencies, but the *de-*
lights also of human life? — to be per-
 sons of *figure*, *power*, and *influence*? —
 and, consequently, capable of serving our
 N friends,

SERM. friends, and relieving the indigent and
 VIII. miserable, in a more *large* and *extensive*
 degree?—Can a condition, which may
 not only be so agreeable, but useful, be
mischievous and *destructive* to mankind?
 It certainly may; nay, it actually has had
 this fatal consequence in many cases. And
 persons who have behaved with honour,
 and an unblemish'd reputation in *moderate*
 circumstances; nay, who have preserved
 their virtue, and manifested great
 presence and strength of mind, under the
 buffetings of *adverse* fortune; have been
 captivated and bewitched by the charms
 of an *affluent prosperity*, and the pleasures
 it brings along with it, and sunk into an
 indolent and dissolute life: Which shows
 us that there is not only *danger*, but *eminent*
 and *peculiar* danger in it, when it
 happens to some particular tempers; and
 in general, where there is not a lively *influence*
 of *religion* and *virtue*, and *firminess*
 and *resolution* of mind. But I proceed
 to consider the Words of the text
 more particularly, in the following method.

- I. I shall endeavour to explain and illustrate what it says concerning the danger of a state of great *riches* and *superfluity* on the one hand, and of *want* and *poverty* on the other; from whence it will clearly appear, that the *middle* condition is in *general*, and, except to some *rare* and *peculiar* tempers, the most convenient and eligible. And
- II. Make some remarks upon this doctrine to prevent *mistakes* that may arise from it, and direct to the right *use* and *improvement* of it.

1st. I am to explain and illustrate what the text says concerning the danger of a state of great *riches* and *superfluity* on the one hand, and of *want* and *poverty* on the other. I shall take them just in the order in which it represents them to us. And

1st. For the danger that attends a state of great *riches* and *superfluity*, which is express'd thus, *least I be full and deny thee, and say who is the Lord?* To deny God signifies in scripture, sometimes, to act as if there was no righteous Gover-

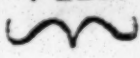
SERM. nour and Judge of Mankind, to whom
 VIII. they are accountable, as well as directly
 to disown his being and providence: But
 I can't apprehend this to be the meaning
 of the phrase here, because, in this large
 view, there is no more danger of deny-
 ing God to men in *high* and *flourishing*
 circumstances, than what *every other*
state of life affords, which, has in it equal
 temptations to vice and immorality: I
 shall take it therefore in a stricter sense
 than this, and yet not in the most confi-
 ned sense of all, and enquire briefly,
 what peculiar danger there is, arising
 from *riches* and *plenty*, of "irreligion
 " and prophaneness, a disregard and con-
 " tempt of providence, and other crimes
 " of a like nature, that are committed
 " more *directly* and *immediately* against
 " God himself."

And, in general, the fundamental
 danger of all lies here, that in the
 height of prosperity, men are apt to be
careless and *inconsiderate*. Chearfulness,
 and a relaxation from severer Studies
 and contemplations, is not only innocent
 but necessary, in the present mixed and
 imper-

imperfect state of human nature : But SERM.
 in an affluent prosperity, when every VIII.
 thing about us is gay, and has a smiling
 aspect, we are too apt to contract an ha-
 bitual *levity* of mind, and neglect all
grave and *serious* reflections. A conti-
 nued succession of pomp and pleasure
 fixes our attention, and diverts it from
 greater and more important concerns.
Wise men, indeed, who have impartially
 estimated the true worth of things, look
 upon riches and honours only as super-
 fluities and outward decorations of life,
 and not as essential to human happiness;
 and value themselves upon them no far-
 ther, than as they enable them to do grea-
 ter good to their fellow creatures; but
 the *foolish* and *unthinking* are made giddy
 by their prosperity : The natural conse-
 quence of which is, that they must be
 an easy prey to all the peculiar tempta-
 tions of their wealthy and exalted state;
 and it will appear, particularly, from the
 following considerations, that they are in
 great danger of the vices implied in the
 text. For

SERM. 1st. When the mind is thus weakened
 VIII. and dissolved, and its faculties enervated
 and broken, when the moderation of
 men's tempers is destroyed, and they are
 become thoughtless and inconsiderate,
 which the *indolence* and *gaiety*, and *various little trifling entertainments* of a
 prosperous condition have a natural tendency to effect; 'tis no wonder, if they
 pride themselves in their riches, as their ultimate happiness; and for want of reflecting on the instability of all human affairs, think themselves self sufficient; and lose that just sense which they ought to have of the sovereignty of their maker, and their absolute and necessary dependence upon him. 'Tis no wonder at all, if, by being *complimented* and *flattered*, their vanity be raised so high, as to make them regardless of that supreme being, from whom all their abundance, honour, and greatness flows; nor if having conceived an extraordinary opinion of their own *merit* upon the account of their shining circumstances, they neglect to pay their due homage and worship to the Deity, and live unmindful of his benefits

This

This is, in effect, to deny not only God's SERM.
government of the world, but his *absolute* VIII.
perfection, and consequently his *being*: 

'Tis to deny our *obligations* to him as the author of every thing we enjoy, and his *right* to our services. The language of such a conduct is, *who is the Lord that we should obey his voice?* And that all this disingenuity and ingratitude towards the greatest and best of beings is a consequence, that, it may justly be feared, will spring from riches and greatness, when men are *immoderately fond* of them, and for want of due consideration, grown *presumptuous* and *arrogant*, experience abundantly testifies.

For there are too many, to whom a time of affliction is a season of *some sort* of piety, because, then their *sufferings* put them in mind of their *sins*, and the hope of deliverance makes them, *to appearance* at least, humble and submissive to their maker; but when things go on smoothly, and answer to the height of their wishes, they seem to think they have no farther *need* of him, and are sufficient for their own happiness, without

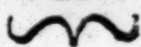
SERM. his *interposition*. The distinguishing goodness of God, in their continued plenty and abundance, is unheeded, because it is *constant* and *uninterrupted*. — What a *perverse* creature is man! he wishes not to be *miserable*, and yet forgets the author of his happiness, because he has not allotted him some mixtures of *evil* and *miser*y with it! — Or rather since this is not *human nature*, which abhors ingratitude, but a vile and melancholy *depravation* of it; what will not a man do when prosperity has made him *wanton* and *insolent*! But further,

2. 'Tis most evident, that affluent circumstances are attended with great temptations to *luxury*, and the immoderate pursuits of *pleasure*. *Plenty* too naturally begets *excess*: It has the *means* of it in its power, *custom* to countenance it, and generally *ministers of vice* enough at hand to prompt and excite to it. And luxury infeebls the mind, destroys every thing that is great and generous, and indisposes for all rational exercises and improvements. It naturally heightens and inflames the *sensual* passions, and leads to the

the pursuit of *irregular pleasures*. For what can that man have to restrain him from any enjoyment that his inclinations prompt him to, who has *wealth, power, and influence* to command them, and the opportunity, perhaps, of gratifying his corrupt appetites in a *private* manner, so as to avoid, in a great measure, that shame and infamy which justly attends it; what, I say, can reasonably be supposed to restrain such a one from indulging his corrupt desires, if he has no regard to *reason, conscience, and the authority* of his maker?

A sense of God, indeed, as the inspector and dreadful avenger of his wickedness, will create great uneasiness and confusion in his mind, and abate his relish of unlawful enjoyments. But can we think, that when he is immersed in sensual pleasures, and given up to vitious pursuits, he will suffer his imagination to be continually haunted and scared by such *ungrateful truths*, if it be in his power to prevent it? will he not endeavour to root out of his mind those *disagreeable Ideas*, which are a constant vexa-

SERM.
VIII.



SERM. vexation and torment to him? So that
 VIII. by his vices, he is necessarily prejudic'd in
 ~~~~~ favour of *Atheism*, and from wishing  
 that there was no God, may come, by  
 degrees, to imagine that there is none;  
 or, at least, which will serve the turn of  
 his vitious inclinations and pleasures full  
 as well, that he does not exercise a parti-  
 cular providence over the *moral* world,  
 nor take an account of their conduct.  
 And as the pomp and splendour of his  
 greatness continually *dazzles* his under-  
 standing, as the levity of his mind, and  
 the gay amusements his riches furnish him  
 with, scarce allow him any opportunity  
 for *close* and *serious thinking*, and his high  
 spirits bear him up against *sudden* and  
*occasional reflections*, he has, upon these  
 accounts, *a better chance* than another  
 man of being confirmed in his *atheistical*  
 sentiments; and of hindering sober rea-  
 sonings about the being and providence  
 of God, and a judgment to come, from  
*fastening* upon him; which, if they  
 were not some way or other diverted,  
 must make the *stoutest* heart tremble in  
 the midst of all its carnal delights: I say  
 indeed



indeed *a better chance*, because to a man of such a depraved disposition, it appears under that character; but the real truth is, that his affluence and luxury only tend to blind and pervert his judgment the more, and, consequently to *harden* him in *Atheism* and *irreligion*. In the —

Third place, If at any time it happens to be the *fashion* to be *Atheistical*, and seem to have no sense of religion, the rich and great are, of all others, most likely to fall in with it. For 'tis, generally, their prevailing view to recommend themselves to the approbation of the *polite* world; and therefore we see daily, that, in compliance with the *reigning* taste, they run into dresses and customs that are neither *ornamental* nor *useful*, nor perhaps so *decent*, as one might expect from persons of a higher education. And, upon the same principle, if it should happen in the present age, as it probably did in *Agur's* time, that a disregard and contempt of the supreme Being, and bantering and ridiculing things sacred, are reckon'd *genteel* accomplishments; if religion should be looked upon

as

SERM.  
VIII.

SERM. as calculated only for the *populace*; and  
 VIII. it should be thought the character of an  
 ~~~~~ *ill bred* man, and one that did not *know*  
the world, to be serious in public offices
 of devotion, or give the least suspicion
 of secret piety; if this, I say, should be
 the case, there is great danger that the per-
 sons above mentioned would fall in with
 the *modish* extravagance. They would,
 probably, think it unbecoming their rank
 and station in life to be out of the *fashion*,
 even in a thing that is so contrary to *jus-*
tice, honour, gratitude, and the true *inte-*
rest of mankind: And their temptations
 to it might be the stronger, as their *pride*
 makes them contemn the ill opinion of
 the vulgar, and their circumstances place
 them above a state of *dependence*.

If it be said, that a disregard of the
 Deity, and discarding both natural and
 revealed religion, prevail very much in
middle life, as well as amongst persons of
 a more *elevated* condition, I answer, that
 this will be found to be no prejudice to
 the present argument; because such, ge-
 nerally speaking, copy after the example
 of their *superiours*, and are prophane, from

a *servile imitation* of them, in order to SERM.
 be fashionable. And just in proportion VIII.
 as *luxury*, which is, *originally*, a vice of
 the great and wealthy, and can't be prac-
 tis'd with *decency* by persons of inferior
 condition, who have not the same oppor-
 tunities for it, and are not able to sup-
 port it without losing their credit, and
 consuming their substance; just, I say, in
 proportion as *luxury* and the pursuit of
pleasure has abounded, *irreligion*, likewise,
 has gain'd ground, and spread itself.
 Thus have I shown the temptations, ari-
 sing from *superfluous wealth* and *greatness*,
 to deny God in the *strict* sense of the
 word, and act with disrespect and ingra-
 titude towards his Providence.

Suffer me now briefly to mention a few
 other vices of the most malignant and fa-
 tal consequence to mankind, to which it
 has *peculiar* temptations. And the

First is *pride* and *vanity*. When men
 are elated by their distinguish'd circum-
 stances, they easily fancy themselves to
 be very *significant* persons, and possess'd
 of *extraordinary* merit: And this vain
 opinion, which is continually fed by their
merce-

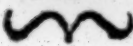
SERM. *mercenary dependents and flatterers* (among whom 'tis scarce possible for any man to preserve a just opinion of himself, and of human nature) discovers itself in every part of their conduct, and in all their appearances. Not but that it may be very innocent and rational for persons of *figure* and *substance* to allow themselves such diversions, and make such an appearance in public, as would be very improper and criminal in those who enjoy but *moderate fortunes*; nor would I be supposed to condemn that external shew and magnificence, which is a badge of *civil* honour, and necessary to distinguish the several ranks of men one from another, or maintain the respect due to their different characters. But for any to pride themselves, and fancy that there is a *proper merit* in dress and equipage, or in the prodigality and glittering pomp of greatness, is a vice that argues a very *low* and *degenerate* turn of mind; and whenever such a temper prevails, it will take men off from improving in those moral dispositions and habits, which alone constitute

true

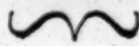
true greatness, and are the only real excellency of a reasonable being. SERM.
VIII.

Farther, riches minister to *ambition*, which is one of the most irregular passions of human nature, and attended with the most mischievous effects: And in proportion to our *vanity*, and the *high views* we entertain for our selves, they have a tendency to beget in us an unbecoming and insolent *contempt* of others. For men are apt to think, that there is so much respect due to their superior circumstances, as if they were of a *different nature* from their fellow creatures, and originally formed in a *higher order* of being; and thus they sacrifice all the rights of mankind, resulting from their *natural equality*, to an *accidental* advantage, which has no merit at all in it otherwise than as 'tis enjoyed with condescension and benevolence, and a subserviency to the general good.

Finally, men are too easily tempted, by their riches and power, to be *imperious* and *tyrannical*, and to abuse those great

SERM. great talents, which God hath put into
 VIII.  their hands for the good of others, to oppression and injustice; by which means they most wickedly pervert the wise scheme of providence, and are more *extensively* mischievous and hurtful, in proportion to their *greater capacity* for doing good. I now proceed

2. To consider what the text says concerning the danger of a state of *want* and *poverty*; or *least I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain*. The vices, to which strait and penurious circumstances of life are here represented as having peculiar temptations, are *theft*, and *taking the name of God in vain*, by which is most probably meant *perjury*. And 'tis very evident, that the temptation to these crimes is, in the nature of the thing, much stronger, when persons are embarrassed with difficulties, and oppressed by poverty, than it can be when they enjoy a superfluity of riches, or even a moderate fortune, which is sufficient to procure for them all necessities,
 and

and proper conveniencies, and places them S E R M.
 above care and anxiety. And as it ap- VIII.
 pears likewise, in fact, that the guilty 
 this way are most frequently necessitous
 people, who have either no employment
 to follow, or else had rather violate the
 most sacred obligations of conscience,
 than be forced to maintain themselves by
 honest labour; I shall say no more to this
 point directly, but enquire into the causes
 why the poor so easily give way to temp-
 tations of this kind. And,

1. 'Tis undoubtedly owing, in a great
 measure, to the want of *a good education*:
 The advantage of this is unspeakable;
 and nothing has a larger share in form-
 ing the difference there is between one
 man and another, tho' *originally* of the
 same species of beings: 'Tis this that
 distinguishes the *politer* parts of the
 world from the most *ignorant* and *bar-*
barous nation: For all mankind have
 the *faculty* of reason implanted in them
 by the great Creator; but if it be not
improved, it will never shew itself to

SERM. advantage : By good culture it may be

VIII. raised to a state of great *maturity* and *perfection* ; but if it be neglected, it will be overrun with *ignorance* and *prejudice*.

Again, all men have a *natural power* to discern the difference between good and evil, and the solid grounds and foundations of morality ; but, notwithstanding this, if they are not *taught* and *instructed*, their notions will be very imperfect, rude, and confused : Now there is this defect, generally, in the education of the *poorer sort* of people. — They are train'd up in a brutal stupidity. — No care is taken to instill into their minds proper notions of God, and of his providence, of a judgment to come, and the difference between virtue and vice.---

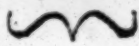
And as they grow up thus *wild*, and without any *good* principles at least, if they are not corrupted by bad examples, and have not imbibed a contempt of all religion, 'tis no wonder that they are dissolute and extravagant in their practice : All which shews us the *great Use*, I might almost

say,

say, *absolute necessity* of a sober and vir- S E R M.
 tuous education, and of infusing senti- VIII.
 ments of wisdom and piety into children
 in their early years, and at the *first dawn*
 of reason: For their minds are then *tender*
 and *flexible*, free from *prejudice* and *un-*
ruly passion, and equally susceptible of
good, as *bad* impressions: And 'tis ge-
 nerally observed, that persons retain
 somewhat of the *tincture* that was given
 them in their education, all their lives
 after.

Another reason why poverty subjects
 men to the temptations intimated in the
 text is, that the poor are not trained up
 regularly to any *employment*, by which
 they may get an honest livelihood; and
 for want of being inured to labour and in-
 dustry, they contract a habit of idleness,
 than which nothing can be more detri-
 mental to society; for it is, indeed, the
parent of all vices: To this, particularly,
 it may be ascribed, that so many subsist
 by rapin and violence, and by abusing and
 plundering their fellow-creatures.

SER M. *Again, persons in such low, mean cir-*
 VII. *cumstances are often destitute of a sense*
 of *shame*, and regard to *reputation*, and,
 consequently, have lost one of the surest
guards of their virtue and integrity, and
 are easily led into the most abominable
 and injurious vices : And this is not on-
 ly owing to their having never received
 any notions of decency in their educa-
 tion, but to the *wrong custom* of the
 world. Poverty it self is look'd upon
 as an object of contempt ; and for a
 poor man to pretend to have any reputa-
 tion to lose, is too often matter of jest
 and ridicule : But this is certainly very
impolitic, as well as unjust ; because 'tis
 for the interest of society to encourage
a sense of honour in every one that has
 a reasonable nature, whatever his outward
 circumstances may be. For it must be
 considered, that a regard to reputation,
 and a sense of shame frequently prevail,
 where the awful notions of a Deity, and
 a providence, and a future state, have lit-
 tle or no influence at all : And therefore,
 if

if these are destroy'd, as they generally SERM.
 are in the wretched poor, by one or other, VIII.
 or both the methods abovementioned, and 
 they think they cannot render themselves
 more despicable by their *wickedness*, than
 they are already on account of their *po-*
verty; 'tis natural to suppose, that they
 may commit such crimes, as they would
 otherwise be *shocked* at the thought of.

And in this insensibility and indiffer-
 ence about the good or ill opinion of the
 world, in this laziness and aversion to la-
 bour, in this brutish stupidity, and those
 corrupt and vicious sentiments, which they
 acquired from their education, they are
 confirmed by their *wicked associates*, per-
 sons, for the most part, of the same aban-
 don'd principles with themselves: So that
 there is scarce a possibility of being re-
 claimed, but, on the other hand, 'tis
 highly probable they will be more and
 more encouraged and hardned in their
 Vices.

Let me just mention *another vice*, that
 comes under the character of *taking God's*

SERM. *Name* in vain, which the poor are notoriously guilty of; and that is the practice of *common swearing*: To this, I know of no *peculiar* temptation arising from their poverty: And it appears, in fact, that there is none; because it is very near, if not altogether, as common among persons of high rank and circumstances, to the very great scandal of religion, and *their own dishonour*. For 'tis a shameful thing that they should indulge to so *vulgar* a vice; a vice, to which there is not the least *temptation*; and which is a *senseless, insignificant expletive* in discourse, that adds neither *strength*, nor *beauty*, to it. And if they will not refrain out of respect to the great God, who is infinitely their superiour and better, or from a dread of his vengeance; they ought at least, out of *good manners*, to be ashamed to continue any longer such an *infamous* practice, to the offence of the soberest and wisest of their fellow-creatures, and in defiance of the laws of their country. I proceed now to the

SECOND

SECOND thing propos'd, *viz.* to suggest SERM
VIII.
a few useful reflections on what has been advanced in the foregoing discourse, in order to prevent mistakes that may arise from it, and direct to the right use and improvement of it. And,

The 1st observation I would make is, that notwithstanding what has been said, both *riches* and *poverty* are capable of being improved to the most useful purposes: For in affluent circumstances, let a man but govern his appetites, and enjoy his fortune with discretion, and he has the utmost advantages for cultivating his mind;—a freedom from the *cares* of life, and consequently an *easiness* and *cheerfulness* of temper, than which nothing is more serviceable to us in the pursuit of knowledge;—leisure for study;—opportunities for consulting the best books, and conversing with the most learned men in all professions, &c. And, besides, which is much more desirable, he has it in his power to exercise *diffusive* and *Godlike benevolence*;—to be the Patron of virtue,

SERM. to encourage it by his example, and support it by his authority and influence, and to be the kind instrument of providence in relieving and comforting his fellow-creatures; and for behaving well in so *critical* a station, and doing so much good to human society, will be entitled to a greater reward. And even a state of *poverty*, if it be born with becoming patience and submission to the will of God, may be of great use, as it inures us to *laborious* and *self-denying* virtue, to strength and firmness of resolution; and consequently prepares for various services of great importance to mankind, which can't be expected from any whose minds are *relax'd* and *enfeebled* by a long course of indolence and luxury, — who are *unexperienc'd* in difficulties, and therefore *frighted* at the prospect of them.

2. As poverty is attended with such disadvantages with respect to the practice of virtue, we should be excited by this consideration to *commiserate* the case of the poor, and relieve them according to

our

our abilities, that we may remove, at least SERM.
 in some degree, the *temptations* they are VIII.
 under to vice and immorality. But 

3. The chief use of all, is to moderate our passion for riches and greatness: Such a station is much more dangerous, when persons are raised to it from a *low* condition, or *moderate* fortune, than to those who have been *bred up* in it: The suddenness of the change, in one case, *shocks* men's tempers, and *oversets* their reason; whereas, in the other, they having been always accustom'd to it, the *impressions* it makes are not so strong and *sensible*. Besides the desire of superfluity is not a *natural* desire;—all can't have it indulg'd, and therefore ought not to be set upon it: They should rather consider what 'tis proper for persons in *their circumstances* to expect, and be contented with that; and not aspire impatiently and eagerly after every thing, that the irregular cravings of an *insatiate* appetite may prompt them to. And from what has been said so largely in this discourse, concerning the danger

SERM. ger that attends worldly prosperity, we
 VIII. may see abundant reason not to *envy* those
 who are possess'd of it. For what is it
 we envy? —why, perhaps *ignorance*,
vice, and *misery*, under a glittering and
 pompous appearance. —The envied cir-
 cumstances, which are so highly the ob-
 ject of our admiration and desire, may
 have corrupted the *virtue* of those whom
 we think happy in the enjoyment of them,
 and, in consequence, have destroyed their
peace; so that they may languish amidst
 all their plenty, and be distracted with
 innumerable cares; or else may be gay
 and thoughtless, or given up to riot and
 luxury. The generality of mankind are
 such wild and inconsiderate creatures, and
 examine so little into the nature of things,
 that a *fine outside* easily deceives them;
 so that they *love*, and *admire*, and con-
 sequently *envy*, they know not what:
 Whereas, if they would weigh matters
 impartially, their reason must inform them,
 that, to some tempers, the *ease*, *laziness*,
 and *affluence* of prosperity will administer

num-

numberless temptations to vice and extravagance ; and that, on the contrary, afflictions may be of great use, when persons can't be brought to *consideration*, or kept in tolerable *order*, any other way : And in such cases they would be led to think very differently from what they usually do, *i. e.* to look upon the *seeming evil* as as *real good*, and on *prosperity* as a *real evil*, notwithstanding its flattering and deceitful appearances. Besides, did they compare their own *intire* case with that of the persons whom they are so apt to envy, they would often find the advantage to be on their own side. For the outward gaiety and splendor of prosperity, if it has corrupted the hearts and manners of its possessors, is a great misfortune, in comparison of *moderate*, nay even of *afflicted* circumstances of life, joined with a grave and considerate mind, regular passions, and a virtuous conduct : Add to this, that prosperity, to those especially who envy it in others, is likely to be attended with the most mischievous and de-

SERM. destructive consequences. For what is the
 VIII. true object of their envy? Is it the *capa-*
 city those persons enjoy of doing *more*
good to their fellow creatures? No! but
 the *abundance, honour, pomp, and luxury,*
 of such a station: And if they are ena-
 mour'd of these things, there is no ground
 to hope that they will guard against any
fashionable excesses, or abridge themselves
 even of the most *unmanly* entertainments
 of a vain and luxurious age.



SERMON

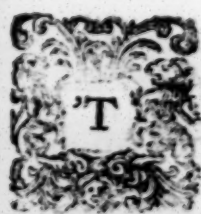


SERMON IX.

The mischiefs of slavish complaisance, and cowardice.

PROV. xxix. 25. former part.

The fear of man bringeth a snare.—SERM.
IX.



IS wisely ordered by the Author of our being, that *every passion* of the soul may not only be of great use to us, if its natural design and tendency be regularly pursued, but is capable also, by being perverted, of causing much vexation and misery to ourselves, and injury to our fellow creatures : For this is a demonstration,

SERM. tion, founded in nature, and obvious to

IX. the meanest capacity of the necessity of
 ~~~~~ *self-government*, and that we should take  
 the utmost care to keep all our affections  
 and appetites within those bounds, which  
 the Creator hath prescribed. Thus, for  
 instance, the *desire* of happiness, and a-  
*version* to pain and misery, which works  
 so strongly in all mankind, is evidently,  
 in itself of the highest advantage; but if  
 we form wrong notions of the happiness  
 which we ought ultimately to pursue, and  
 the evils we should chiefly avoid, it will  
 as certainly prove fatal to us. Again, the  
 passion of *shame*, is an excellent preserva-  
 tive from base and dishonourable actions,  
 and nothing is a stronger guard and secu-  
 rity to our virtue and innocence than this,  
 when regularly exercised, and employ'd  
 about proper objects; but a *false shame*,  
 which is influenced more by the opinions  
 and customs of men, than by the eternal  
 differences of things, a *false shame* that  
 breaks our spirits, and makes such tame  
 cowards of us, that we have not resolu-  
 tion enough to stand up for the honour  
 of God, and the immutable obligations  
 of

of virtue ; nor, consequently, to assert and S E R M. maintain the dignity of our reasonable IX. nature ; this, I say, necessarily destroys every thing that is praise-worthy and generous in us, and must betray us into innumerable errors in practice, which are not merely inconsistent with *integrity*, but will render us, to the last degree, *vile* and *contemptible*.

And the same may be said of *fear* : While it proceeds upon right principles, and is proportioned to the weight and moment of the evils about which it is conversant, it must be calculated to serve the most beneficial purposes, as it warns us where our greatest danger lyes, and strongly prompts us to avoid it : But the case is quite otherwise when it forms *imaginary* dangers, and alarms with *false* terrors ; ---when *fancy* or *corrupt passion*, and not the reason of things is the foundation and root of it ;---when we fear *natural* evils, which, under the direction of an all-wise providence, may be over-ruled for good, more than *moral*, which tend necessarily and invariably to the misery and ruin of the rational creation ; and the censures and frowns



SERM. frowns of men, whose wisdom, power, and

IX. duration is *confined* and *limited*, more than  
 the displeasure and vengeance of the Almighty and eternal God; for then our fears will infallibly turn us aside from our duty, and be attended with most pernicious consequences, as for the sake of avoiding lesser and comparatively trifling evils, we shall run ourselves upon others that are infinitely more dreadful: Which shows us the vast importance of looking well to our *principles* of action, and indeed of making this our first and chief care; because if the prevailing *principles* of our minds are corrupt and vicious, 'tis, in the nature of things, impossible, that our *practice* should be virtuous and regular. Evil principles of action, as long as they are entertained and indulged, as necessarily produce a wicked life, as any other causes do their *natural* and *immediate effects*; and therefore till they are corrected and altered, 'tis in vain to expect any reformation in the outward conduct. This is the ground of *Solomon's* observation in the text, which

I now proceed to consider more particularly, in the following method.

SERM.  
IX.  
~

- I. I shall show what we must understand by *the fear of man*.
- II. In what sense it *bringeth a snare*.  
And,
- III. Offer some remedies against it.

I. I am to explain what we must understand by *the fear of man*. *The fear of man* I take in its largest sense, not only as implying the fear of those positive evils and punishments, which the power and vengeance of man can inflict, but a reverence of human authority, and customs, and a dread of the censures, and reproaches of our fellow creatures. But that I may talk distinctly, and without confusion, upon this subject, it may be proper briefly to show, that this phrase, when it is used, as in the text, in a *criminal sense*, must be understood with some *caution*, and *limitation*. For,

1<sup>st</sup>. There is, undoubtedly, a *reverence* due to *human authority* in all points that do not exceed the just bounds of it: and

P

the

SERM. the paying this regard is absolutely neces-

IX. sary to hold the frame of civil societies together, and prevent lawless riot and confusion. In like manner there is a *deference* due to the *innocent customs* and *usages* of the world; and singularity in such instances, in opposition to the unanimous opinion of our fellow creatures, can be the effect of nothing but *weakness*, or *obstinacy*: Such a conduct is as *ridiculous*, as the complying, in things morally evil, would be *wicked*: 'Tis also utterly inconsistent with a *social* spirit, or with that temper of mind which is absolutely necessary to answer the great end, for which men agreed, at first, to enter into society. For the ends of society cannot be secured but by mutual condescension and respect, and the compliance and submission of the *minor* part, in things lawful, and which are entirely of a *civil* nature, to the judgment and practice of the *majority*; and 'tis impossible but peace and good order must be destroyed, if all the members of it are *stiff* and *untractable*.

Again,



Again, as 'tis natural for every one who SERM.  
 loves himself to desire the favour and IX.  
 good opinion of his fellow creatures, and  
 his duty to cultivate and improve it by all  
*just and honourable* methods, because the  
 quiet and convenience of his life, and his  
 usefulness too, depends, in a great mea-  
 sure, on his reputation and character  
 in the world; he cannot help being *a-*  
*fraid* of censure and reproach, and ought  
 to be solicitous to avoid (if possible) its  
 being fixed upon him, or to deliver and  
 clear himself from it. Provided he stoops  
 to nothing that is contrary to the prin-  
 ciples of true honour, and virtue, such a  
 concern is highly just, and reasonable,  
 and what no *wise* man can be without.  
 And, on the contrary, men must be of a  
 temper quite stupid, and destitute of com-  
 mon reflection, if they have no fear at  
 all of *public reproach* and *infamy*, and  
 must lose, besides, what is in the nature  
 of things (and therefore what must ap-  
 pear to be designed as such by the great  
 author of nature) a very powerful restraint  
 from *mean, ungenerous, and disgraceful*  
*practices.*

SERM. 3d. The principle of *self-preservation*  
 IX. necessarily excites in us a fear of those  
 evils, which we have reason to apprehend from the power or malice of any of our fellow creatures, and directs to the use of all proper means for our own defence and security. We are so far from being oblig'd to have no care, or sollicitude on this head, that we shall be guilty of the utmost rashness and folly, if we expose ourselves to their resentment unnecessarily, and run upon any sufferings, which with honour and a good conscience, may be avoided. All *innocent*, not excepting the most artful, compliances and evasions must be used, to screen ourselves from evils of this kind; otherwise, instead of being martyrs in a good cause, we only suffer the natural effects of our own wilfulness and obstinacy. And finally, a *dread* of those punishments which the civil magistrate inflicts, for the preservation of mens natural rights, and the security of their persons and properties from unjust violence, and to deter from the commission of such vices as are inconsistent with the publick peace and welfare;

fare; this, I say, is not only lawful, be-  
cause natural inconveniences and evils of  
all kinds cannot but be the object of our  
fear and aversion, but necessary; both as  
the end of these punishments cannot be  
answered, nor, consequently, civil socie-  
ties subsist, unless we are struck with ter-  
ror at the apprehension of them, and be-  
cause they, are, in themselves, fit and rea-  
sonable, and no more than what the  
crimes, for which they are executed,  
strictly deserve. A man indeed, that suf-  
fers, by *unjust* human laws, for what is  
really praise-worthy, may support him-  
self with this reflection, that he suffers  
for the cause of *truth* and *virtue*, and,  
being conscious of his *integrity*, defy  
the power and cruelty of his persecutors;  
but he that can bear to think, without  
horror, of being *deservedly* branded with  
public infamy, and cut off as an enemy  
to society, and the good of mankind, must  
have extinguish'd his *reason*, and lost all  
remains of *honour* and *ingenuity*.

Thus far then the fear of man may be  
defended and justified. In some of the  
instances which have been mentioned, it



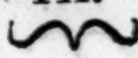
SERM. is, at least, *lawful*, because founded on  
 IX. principles that human nature cannot  
 throw off; and in others *virtuous*, and  
*commendable*: But it becomes criminal,  
 when 'tis the *ruling* and *predominant* prin-  
 ciple in our minds; because then it either  
 supposes, that we look upon the appro-  
 bation and favour of men as our su-  
 preme good, and upon the frowns, re-  
 proaches, and terrors of the world as the  
 greatest evil that can befall us; or, at  
 least (as 'tis always the nature of that  
 which is the prevailing principle, to *over-*  
*rule* and *controul* all other principles) it  
 will be too hard for the fear of God, bear  
 down our natural sense of good and evil,  
 and destroy that presence of mind, that  
 constancy and resolution, which is neces-  
 sary to enable us to behave with honour  
 to our nature, and suitably to those rela-  
 tions in which the all-wise creator hath  
 placed us, and to overcome the difficul-  
 ties of a virtuous course. And from this  
 short account of the sinful *fear of man*  
 which the text speaks of, it will easily ap-  
 pear in the

2d. Place, in what sense it *bringeth a* SERM.  
*snare*, which I proceed therefore to consi- IX.  
der. And not to insist on many little  
mean compliances, and *smaller* inconveni-  
ences, to which it exposes men; it throws  
temptations in their way which are likely  
to prevail so far, as to destroy all im-  
provements in true wisdom and virtue.  
For,

1st. Let us suppose a man, under the  
influence of this *slavish* principle engaged  
in searches after truth; — what profi-  
ciency is it possible for him to make?  
If he has an extravagant veneration for  
*human authority*, nothing must be receiv'd  
but what has *that stamp* upon it. — If  
he aims at being *popular*, and dreads ill  
will and censure, no truths can be admit-  
ted but such as are *fashionable*, and have  
the current character and reputation of  
*orthodoxy*. The odious names of *Infidel*  
and *Heretic* will frighten him from pro-  
ceeding in his enquiries, and calling in  
question the *common standard*. — Or if  
he is awed by the *vengeance* of civil power,  
and the *terrors* of this world, this must  
raise an unconquerable aversion in his  
P 4 mind

SERM. mind against all truths, that may expose  
IX. him to *danger*, and *suffering*.

~~~~~ In order to the making improvements in divine knowledge, 'tis absolutely necessary that the mind be *free*, *calm*, and *unruffled*, under no *restraint*, or *terror*; otherwise it will be *reserv'd* and *partial*: There must be no *corrupt passion* to darken the understanding, nor *private interest* to mislead and pervert it. But the man we are speaking of is held in strong fetters; his fears *distract* and *confound* him; he sees difficulties and discouragements on every side, and but one safe path to walk in, even the *old beaten track* chalk'd out by authority, which is the only way to that esteem, applause, and favour, which he so ardently pursues, and to avoid that disgrace, and those sufferings, which are of all things, most terrible to his imagination.——And being thus *enslav'd*, is it to be expected that he should exercise impartiality and freedom of thought?——Where the light is so *offensive*, is it not highly probable that the eyes of the mind will be shut against it?——'Tis *difficult* even for men who are influenc'd by more  
rational

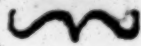
rational and noble principles, and have a SERM.
 virtuous turn of mind, to maintain an IX.
 unbiaſs'd and ſteddy purſuit of truth, 
 when the world *frowns* upon it, and
 loads it with *reproaches* and *persecutions*;
 but to him, who is ready to ſacrifice
 every thing to his reputation and world-
 ly intereſt, it muſt be abſolutely *impoſſi-
 ble*. Let us ſuppoſe, however, that, not-
 withſtanding his fears, he may be *impar-
 tial* in his ſearches after truth; the caſe
 will be very much the ſame, with reſpect
 to the good reſulting from it, as if they
 entirely *ſuppreſs'd* his inquiries. For,

2dly, This principle will infallibly pre-
 vail with him, in times of difficulty and
 danger, either to *conceal*, or *deny* it. 'Tis
 as great an abſurdity to expect, that one
 who is diſpirited by worldly fears ſhould
 be a *confessor* and *martyr* for true religion,
 as that a *coward* ſhould be brave and
 valiant. The *fearful* and *unbelieving*, or, at
 leaſt, the rejecters of true religion, when
 it is oppreſs'd and perſecuted, are there-
 fore juſtly join'd together in ſcripture,
 becauſe they are, in the nature of things,
 inſeparable; For the prevailing concern
 of

SERM. of such persons is to avoid that which is

IX. the object of their fears, and, consequently, every thing else must give way to it. So that the direct consequence of this destructive principle is insincerity, and the making *shipwreck of faith, and a good conscience*; and if it had sway'd in Christ and his apostles, and the primitive disciples, Christianity could never have been propagated in the world; and should it universally prevail in future ages, mankind must for ever remain in their ignorance and errors, without a possibility of a reformation.

But this is not the worst effect of it; for it leads men even to *revile* and *banter* the truth.—Whence, else, do many of the *profane scoffs*, that are thrown out against religion, proceed, but from this source? ——— The persons who make use of 'em cannot, generally, be suspected of bantering Christianity, upon being convinc'd that 'tis in itself ridiculous, because they never examin'd it, or consider'd the pretensions on which its authority is founded. ——— They want either *capacity*, or *inclination*, or *both*, for such an enquiry.

quity.——The thing is attended with SERM.
difficulty, and requires somewhat of *thought*, IX.
 which they are strangers and enemies to, 
 and cannot bear the *fatigue* of. But to
 be a *wit*, and to be *fashionable* in the
 companies they frequent, is a much easier
 thing. 'Tis but getting the laugh against
 revelation, by throwing out a *dull common-*
place-jest against it, and the business is
 done. Tho', as an ingenious author * ob-
 serves, a very little *sense*, with a good
 deal of *vice* and *ill nature*, will qualify a
 man for this kind of satire. I shall con-
 clude what I have to say concerning these
unthinking little critics with this single
 remark; that how much soever they may
 magnify their own abilities, and be puffed
 up for being thought persons of refin'd
 reason, and uncommon penetration, by
 such as are no wiser than themselves,
 they really act a very foolish part, in
 abusing and ridiculing things sacred, only
 because they do not *understand* them, and,
 for the sake of a light wanton piece of
 drollery, hazarding the salvation of their
 immortal souls.

But

* *Archbishop Tillotson.*

SERM. But to proceed. The slavish *fear* of
 IX. *man* will have the same malignant influence upon our morals, as it has been shewn to have, in its direct tendency, upon our *faith*: For when it is risen to such a height, as to overrule the dictates of natural conscience, and entirely to destroy the strength and constancy of our minds, we are an easy prey to every temptation, and lie open to the most desperate and abandon'd wickedness: Its tendency to an immoral practice appears, in part, from what has been already said, wherein it has been shewn, that in difficult and discouraging times, it leads men to conceal, or deny, the truth, and, consequently, to *disimulation* and *hypocrisy*; but this, being a matter of great importance, deserves to be more particularly and fully illustrated.

Let us suppose, then, a person of this character to live in very corrupt times, when virtue is *unpopular*, and labours under disgrace, and vice is prevailing and *fashionable*: He dreads the reproaches of the *multitude*, and yet these he is sure to meet with if he pursues a virtuous course

course of life; what then can be expect-SERM.
 ed but that he will give himself up to all IX.
 the extravagancies of the age, and fall in
 with the *common* degeneracy? The charge
 of *singularity*, and the *odium* that attends
 it, will be more than sufficient to counter-
 ballance his weak inclinations towards
 virtue, and to make him as heartily and
 universally vitious as the rest of his neigh-
 bours; tho' it be, really, our glory to be
singular in asserting the honour of our
 maker, and vindicating the law of our
 reasonable nature, which is of the most
 sacred and indispenfable obligation, and
 a cause of the highest importance; and
 the utmost pitch of madness to debase
 our excellent faculties, and make our-
 selves miserable, only because others are
 so *frantic* as to do the like, and to
 avoid the imputation of *obstinate* and *un-*
mannerly preciseness.

Again, if it be a man's favourite
 scheme to acquit himself to the *polite*
 world, and he dreads their contempt as
 the greatest of all misfortunes; what
 is the natural consequence? Why, that
 if these pretenders to politeness are
 dissolv'd in *effeminacy*, and make *luxury*
 and

SERM. and *riot* the characteristic of a fine

IX. gentleman, he must immediately resign
 himself up to the gratification of his
 appetites, and to all the *modish* vices.
 And, accordingly, tho' it be indeed shocking
 and monstrous, and greatly to the
 disgrace of the present age, there are too
 many, who, from a *false modesty*, and
 because they will not be so *rude* as to
 contradict the general humour of their
 company, are guilty of extravagancies
 which they have a secret abhorrence of;
 and some, 'tis to be fear'd, who to raise
 their character for debauchery, and, consequently,
 for an *elegant taste*, boast of
 vices that they never committed. —

Alas, where is the *reason* of mankind,
 where their becoming sense of the *dignity*
 of human nature, when they can glory
 in what is the reproach and shame of it;
 and endeavour to support the reputation,
 not merely of being *men*, but the most
refin'd part of the species, on such actions,
 as sink 'em below the rank of *brute*
 creatures! For, in truth, as such persons
 will not think for themselves, they
 ought to be told, that vice and wickedness
 of all kinds is the greatest *abuse* and

violence that can be offer'd to their rational faculties ; — that there cannot be a fine gentleman without *good sense* and a *just discernment* of things, at least, not without *true honour*, which is inseparable from virtue ; — that blaspheming the establish'd religion of their country, and those things which all considerate and sober men highly value and reverence, is a very *mean* accomplishment, and what not only a serious *Deist*, but even a downright *Atheist*, who has any knowledge of the world, and any notion of *right* behaviour, may be asham'd of ; — and that a *singular aukward dress*, an *impertinent trifling gaiety*, and a *thoughtless unmeaning* conduct, will not atone for a violation of those essential rules of civility and decency. Let me add, that all the vices, into which the evil principle mention'd in the text betrays those who are govern'd by it, argue the utmost baseness of spirit, and consequently both they, and the principle from whence they proceed, are as inconsistent with the character of a *hero*, and a man of *true honour*, as they are with that of a *good Christian*.

To

SERM.
IX.

SERM. To conclude this head, if it be our

IX. ultimate view to secure the countenance and favour of persons in *authority*, and avoid their displeasure, this likewise will subject us to many snares and inconveniences. The laws indeed of all well regulated societies are favourable to virtue, and pointed at vice and immorality: But notwithstanding this, the state of things may be, and oftentimes is so corrupt, that vicious compliances are necessary to obtain the good will of our superiors; and when this is the case, the man who is determined, at all adventures, to secure their approbation, and avoid their frowns, must be easily captivated and seduc'd: He must, and probably will, be a companion with them in luxury and prodigality, lie and dissemble, flatter their vanity, and be the instrument of their ambition, covetousness, and unlawful pleasures. So that, in every view of it, the slavish *fear of man* has an evident tendency to corrupt our integrity, and leads to the most hurtful and destructive vices.

But it may be said, there is still this advantage, that when authority, power,
and

and interest are on the side of true religion and virtue, this principle will as effectually excite to a love and reverence

SERM.

IX.

of *these*, as it will, in contrary circumstances, to *immorality* and *wickedness*. It must be own'd it will to outward appearance. But this desirable state of things is likely to happen but seldom, the generality of the world being too frequently in the wrong, with respect both to their *opinions* and *practices*; or if it should happen, men would entirely lose the *merit* of their affected concern and zeal for virtue and piety, because of motives from which it flows. For nothing can render either our enquiries after truth, or the performance of religious duties properly laudable, but their being the matter of our *free choice*, and our acting from such dispositions, as have a tendency to the same conduct in *all* circumstances. And that virtue, on the contrary, can be worth but little, which in times of prosperity, and when it is countenanc'd and upheld by the influence of authority, and by public favour, only *seems* to flourish, and does not spring from its *genuine* principles; but fades and languishes, and entirely dis-

Q

appears,

SERM. appears, as soon as 'tis brought to a *trial*.

IX. Having thus consider'd the snares and temptations, fatal to religion and sincerity, which attend *the fear of man*, when it is a predominant and governing passion. I proceed,

In the third and last place, to offer some remedies against it. And,

1st. Let us maintain and improve in our minds a strong sense of the necessary difference between good and evil. For if we are firmly convinc'd, that there is a fixed and eternal law for the conduct of all rational beings in the nature of things, which cannot be alter'd by *custom* and *opinion*, nor by any *authority* whatsoever, no not by that of God himself, we shall not be easily persuaded to violate the rules of our duty, upon any considerations. Men who think *loosely* may be apt to imagine, that the obligations of virtue are not so strict and indispensable; and perhaps, that God will excuse a deviation from 'em, when they are *forced* to it by reproaches and persecutions: But had they enquired into the true grounds of morality, they would have found that its obligation is immutable, and consequently, that

that where there is a wilful departure from S E R M.
it, nothing can possibly recommend us to IX.
the divine favour. And thus a more
steddy regard to religion would prevail,
and *the fear of man* proportionably
decrease. To this remedy against it, let
us add,

2dly, A becoming sense of the *dignity*
of our nature. This can only be sup-
ported by an inflexible adherence to the
rules of virtue and true goodness ; but,
by improving in these, we are capable of
advancing to a *God-like* perfection. And
shall we dishonour and obscure our ra-
tional powers, by enslaving 'em to vice
and wickedness ? This thought, made
habitual to our minds, would sustain our
resolution against all the terrors of the
world ; this thought, I say, that we have
the honour to be formed after the *image*
of God, and that as long as we maintain
our moral rectitude, we continue to *re-*
semble him ; and, especially, that by be-
ing stedfast in our duty, in spite of all
oppositions and discouragements, we imi-
tate the greatest and most exalted part of
his character, his *constant and invariable*
goodness.

Q 2

3dly,

SERM. 3dly, Against the vice pointed at in the
 IX. text, the wise man advises as a remedy,
 in the latter part of the verse, *trust in
 God: the fear of man bringeth a snare,
 but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord,
 shall be safe.* For if we firmly believe
 the wisdom and goodness of his over-
 ruling providence, that he orders all
 things for the best, and with a design to
 promote the general happiness; and that
 all the evils we suffer for righteousness
 sake will be abundantly compensated, and
 turn, in the end, to our unspeakable ad-
 vantage; this ought, in reason, to mo-
 derate our fears, compose the hurry and
 disorder of our minds, and reconcile us
 to all events. And accordingly, we find
 this serene and pious disposition in the
 holy *Psalmist*, who expresses himself thus,
 Psal. xxvii. with an air of security and triumph: *The
 1. Lord is my light, and my salvation, whom
 shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of
 Ps. cxviii. my life, of whom shall I be afraid?* and
 6. again, *the Lord is on my side, I will not
 fear what man can do unto me.*

Finally, as the most *effectual* remedy
 against the fear of man, let us cultivate
 a supreme reverence of God. These two
 are

are absolutely inconsistent, and cannot SERM.
subsist together : For as the fear of man IX.
destroys our due regard to the divine ma-
jesty, the true fear of God will *limit*, and
reduce within *reasonable* bounds, the
dread of our fellow-creatures. Let us,
therefore, by frequent meditation, fix in
our minds a lively idea of his absolute
perfection. Let us contemplate his spot-
less holiness, strict impartial justice, infi-
nite power, and boundless wisdom, in or-
der to excite the highest possible awe and
veneration of him. Let us seriously con-
sider that he is the author of our being,
and of every thing we enjoy, that we are
necessarily dependent upon him, that our
happiness and misery are entirely in his
power, who has universal nature at his
command, and is the sovereign uncon-
troulable disposer of all events ; and, con-
sequently, that his favour is our *life*, and
his displeasure the most dreadful of all
evils. And if we are afraid of the re-
proaches of ignorant, prejudiced and sinful
men, how much more strongly should we
be concerned to prevent his having an ill
opinion of us, who is the greatest and best
of beings, and whose judgment is always

SERMON. according to truth, certain and infallible?

IX. To conclude, the wisdom of God is capable of contriving, and his power of executing vengeance infinitely more terrible on impenitent sinners, than any thing they can undergo in the present state; and whereas the scene of all the tyranny and oppression which we can suffer from our fellow-creatures, is confined with the narrow compass of this mortal and uncertain existence, he has *an unchangable and endless life*, and, consequently, can not only punish in what *degree*, but to what *length of duration* he pleases. Our saviour's advice, therefore, is certainly very just and

Mat. x. 28. reasonable; *not to fear them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather to fear him, who after having made perverse and irreclaimable offenders miserable, in such a measure, and for so long a period, as the wise ends of his government require, can absolutely destroy both soul and body in hell,*

SERMON

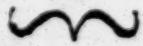


SERMON X.

Rules for the profitable reading the
Holy Scriptures.

JOHN V. 39.

Search the scriptures.——

 S mankind are endued with SERM.
moral powers, and confe- X.
quently accountable creatures, 
it necessarily follows, that they
had always a law or rule of action *suf-*
ficient to direct their conduct. The
original and *universal* law was what we
call the law, or religion of nature : This
Q 4 their

SERM. their *reason* was capable of discovering;

X. and it would have taught them, if they
 had consulted, and carefully attended to it,
 the being and perfections of God, his providential government of the world, the duties they owed to him, and one another, and which related to the right government of their affections and appetites; and, in short, how to behave in the various circumstances and relations of human life. In like manner, it would have furnished proper motives to a regular and virtuous conduct,—— from the excellency of virtue in itself;—— its necessary tendency to the perfection and happiness of human nature, and the good of society;— and by giving a well grounded hope, in some way or other worthy his infinite wisdom, and concern for the rectitude and order of the moral world, of the special protection and favour of their Creator, and supreme Governour.

But notwithstanding this wise provision, by the natural light planted in every man's mind, the world became, in fact, *grossly* and almost *universally* depraved;

ran

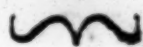
ran into deplorable ignorance of God ; in-SERM.
to childish and very dishonourable con- X.
ceptions of his nature and attributes ; in-
to idolatry ; and an absurd, hurtful, and
endless superstition ; and their R E L I -
G I O N corrupted their morals. 'Twas
not because their reason was, *in itself*,
insufficient to direct to better sentiments
of things, but because it was not *im-*
proved and *cultivated*. However, as man-
kind was really thus corrupted, and had
lost, in a great measure, the knowledge
of the true religion of nature, the ex-
pediency and usefulness of a revelation
was not at all the less, merely because
reason, if rightly exercised, was capable
of discovering all the necessary principles
of morality ; nay, indeed, the advantage
of it is altogether as evident, as it would
have been, if men were *unavoidably* igno-
rant of the great truths of religion. For
how they came to be out of the way is
not the question, whether it proceeded
from a defect in their natural powers, or
from want of attention, and not using
these powers as they ought ; in both cases,
'tis certain, they *needed* to be set right a-
gain,

SERM. gain, and recovered to a just sense of their
 X. duty, and happiness: And accordingly
 ~~~~~ God was pleased graciously to interpose,  
 and give a revelation suited to the *circumstances* and *necessities* of an ignorant and degenerate world: But tho' this revelation was an unspeakable privilege *at first*, by putting a stop to superstition and wickedness, and diffusing light and knowledge amongst men; tho' it may *still* be of the utmost use, to the bulk of mankind, as a *standing rule*, by supplying them constantly with proper thoughts, which is what the common people, in all ages, have most wanted, and prescribing a plain, intelligible, and compleat rule of morals; notwithstanding, I say, that a revelation is so desireable a blessing, and may answer such valuable purposes, 'tis certain that men may pervert it, as well as extinguish their reason; and that if it be neglected, and not examined into with care and impartiality, it will be, just as that natural light was, and is at present, in the more ignorant and superstitious parts of the world, *dark* and *useless*: Of which the monstrous corruptions of christianity in *Popish* countries, equal to any



ruptions of natural religion in the most barbarous *Heathen* nations, are a notorious and unanswerable proof.

SERM. X.



'Tis indeed a principle of their faith, that the common people are not to examine into their religion; but take it *implicitly* from the church: And it must be allowed, that this is a necessary principle to establish *antichristian tyranny* over the consciences of men, and support schemes of doctrine which bid defiance to reason, and are inconsistent with the whole design and tenour of revelation: These things will not bear the light, nor stand a free and impartial trial, and therefore are sheltered under the covert of ignorance and darkness. But can any thing be more absurd than such a conduct as this? Does it not derogate, in the highest degree, from the excellency and perfection of the scriptures? is it not a very unworthy and injurious reflection on the wisdom and goodness of God? nay does it not entirely destroy all the ends and uses of the Christian revelation?

'Twill be needless to enter into a large proof of these things in any nation where *light* and *liberty* prevails, and persons have

SERM. a just notion of their rights, either as *men*,  
 X. or as *Christians*. For if God gives any  
 revelation at all, the common sense of  
 mankind determines, that it must, in all  
 essential and important branches of it, be  
 a plain and easy rule; obvious to the ca-  
 pacities of all for whose benefit it is de-  
 signed. For what is the end of a revela-  
 tion? Is it not to instruct the ignorant, and  
 consequently to lay down plain principles  
 for directing and regulating their behavi-  
 our? Or is it to amuse and confound their  
 minds yet more with *deep subtilties*, with  
*perplexed* and *intricate* speculations? A re-  
 velation that is not intelligible is as much a  
 contradiction, as to say darkness is light. And  
 there is an unanswerable force in the com-  
 mon argument used upon this occasion, *viz.*  
 either that God *could not* reveal himself  
 clearly in those points which are of the  
 greatest consequence to mankind, or that he  
*would not*: The former of these reflects up-  
 on his *wisdom*, the latter on his *goodness*;  
 so that either way, the supposition is un-  
 worthy of God, and dishonourable to his  
 perfections; since it represents him as a  
 very *weak*, or else as a *capricious ill-na-*  
*tur'd* being, who intended not to assist,  
 but

but bewilder his creatures, and lead them S E R M.  
into a maze of uncertainty and confusion. X.

Again, a revelation that is dangerous to be read, and can't be trusted to the reason and judgment of mankind, that needs to be *illustrated, corrected, or supplied* by a *living infallible oracle, and judge of controversies*, is altogether as insignificant as no revelation at all. If men have a *standing rule* to have recourse to, 'tis, at least, possible, that if they seriously consider and search into it, they may frame just notions of things, a rational scheme to act upon: But if they are *blindly* to follow their spiritual guides, and swallow all their doctrines *implicitly*, they are liable to endless impostures; and can have no guard against the most *stupid enthusiasm*, nor even against *irreligion* itself.

Finally, a revelation designed for *general* use, which is evidently the case of the Christian, must be chiefly calculated for the bulk of mankind, and adapted to their capacities. The *ingenious* and *thinking* part have, in every age, been a very few; and the generality, persons of *little reflection*, who must be instructed in the most easy and familiar manner, and taught  
their



SERM. their duty with the greatest plainness and  
 X. simplicity. To assert therefore that the  
 ~~~~~ scriptures are obscure, and unintelligible,  
 full of mystery and darkness, renders
 them quite useless as an *universal* rule;
 and consequently defeats the very end of
 their being written, which was *general*
 instruction: and to deny the reading of
 them to the *common people* is to deny it to
 those, for whose benefit they were more
 directly and immediately intended. This
 is the manifest reason of the thing.

Agreeably hereto, we find the scrip-
 ture itself is so far from *debarring*
 the people of this right, that it *insists*
 upon it, and *encourages* it in the strongest
 terms. There are no distinctions of per-
 sons, some to *lead*, and others *absolutely*
to submit to their interpretations and de-
 cisions; but the exhortations and instruc-
 tions are *general*. They were not the
Scribes and *Pharisees*, and *Doctors* of
 the law, but the *common sort* of Jews to
 whom our saviour said in the text, *search*
the scriptures; nay, whom he supposes
 not only capable of understanding the
plain doctrines and laws of the Old Te-
 stament, but the more *obscure* and *intricate*
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parts of it, the prophecies relating to the SERM.
 Messiah; *search the scriptures, they are* **X.**
they that testify of me: And for this the
 people of *Berea* are greatly commended,
viz. for not believing the Apostles them-
 selves implicitly, but *searching the scrip-* Acts xvii.
tures daily, whether these things were so. ^{11.}

This practice of theirs is represented as the
 mark of a *noble* and *ingenuous* mind;
 whereas the contrary springs from abject
 and slavish prejudice. In like manner St.
Paul speaks of *Timothy*, and describes it
 as what had been of great advantage to
 him, *that from a child he had known the* 2 Tim. i.
holy scriptures. And of those same scrip-^{15.}
 tures he says, that they were *able to make* Ibid.
him wise unto salvation; and again, *all* Ver. 16,
scripture is profitable for doctrine, for re- ^{17.}
proof, for correction, for instruction in
righteousness, that the man of God may
be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all
good works. Now if it was the duty of
all to search into the *Jewish* scriptures,
 and even into dark prophecies, the com-
 mon people must certainly be proper jud-
 ges of, and consequently obliged to exa-
 mine into, the plain facts, doctrines, and
 moral precepts of Christianity. Nay, it
 can't

SERM. can't be reconciled to the wisdom of God,

X. to suppose, that the *last* and most *perfect* revelation of his will is not also the *clearest* and *fullest*; or that the same characters of being *profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness*, which render it fit to be perused and studied by all, do not belong to that in a much higher degree, than they did to a *preparatory* revelation of *inferior* consequence, and more *limited* extent.

And as the right of all the people to search the scriptures is evident, founded in reason, and strongly asserted in the revelation itself; so are the advantages of it.—Reading the scriptures with seriousness and diligence, is the natural way for men to form a *consistent* and *rational* scheme of belief and practice, just notions of God, and of the extent of religious and moral obligations: By this means, they will have a *strait, easy* rule to go by, and build their hopes of happiness upon a solid foundation: Whereas the want of it has introduced *incomprehensible* and *senseless* articles of faith, doctrines prejudicial to *morality*, *dark* and *gloomy* notions of God,

God, and *superstitious* fears destructive of SERM. the peace and comfort of men's minds.--- X.

Reading the scriptures with impartiality, will inspire sincere and honest minds with *humanity* and *benevolence*, with *moderation* and *forbearance* in lesser differences: But the neglect of it occasions hot and angry controversies, blind and violent disputes, and a zeal without *knowledge* or *discretion*.—Again, by this means common Christians will better understand the *grounds* of their faith, and consequently be more firmly established in it: They will be more fully acquainted with the *intrinsic* excellence of the doctrines of Christianity, and the strength and force of its *external* evidence; and so be believers, not upon the foot of *tradition* and *authority*, which confirms all religions equally, but upon rational conviction and choice: They will also find it much more easy to detect the sophistry and false reasoning of its adversaries; whose practice 'tis (and in that they must soon be discovered by such as study the scriptures,) to expose and argue against the corruptions and extravagancies of *party-schemes* as true Christianity.

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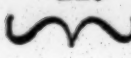
SERM. But the greatest motive of all to a diligent search of the Holy Scriptures, is that mentioned in the text, that in them we *believe we have eternal life*: Therein we have an assurance of a happy immortality, as the reward of true piety and virtue, which to reason is very *obscure* and *doubtful* at least, if at all *probable*. Reason may discover something, *in general*, of a future state of rewards, but gives very little ground to expect that they will be *eternal*: This is the *unspeakable gift* of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. As therefore the gospel is the only sure foundation we have of this glorious hope, we should read it frequently for the satisfaction and comfort of our minds, and carefully examine upon what terms we may hope to be entitled to it: This is the most important interest of our being, and should therefore be the chief object of our study. An error here may be of fatal consequence, which renders our utmost diligence necessary. And as these sacred writings contain the rule by which we shall be judged, and have our eternal condition determined, need any thing be added to excite us to search into them with

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with the greatest exactness, as for the SERM. most excellent and beneficial knowledge; X. and with the greatest impartiality, that we may not be imposed on in so high and momentous a concern. Indolence or negligence, in this great point, is certainly most unaccountable and unpardonable stupidity. But I must content myself with just mentioning these things, that I may proceed to what I chiefly design'd, and judge to be the most useful part of a discourse on this subject, *viz.* to lay down some rules for the profitable reading the scriptures. By not observing these rules men have lost all the advantages of this study; and besides from hence have risen all those inconveniences, which have been represented as the natural consequence of allowing the use of them to the common people, and urg'd as arguments against it.

The first thing that I would recommend is, that we come to the search with honest and unprejudic'd minds. In order to the finding out truth in the great points that relate to moral practice, *an acute understanding* is not so necessary as a *sincere upright heart*; and even the *plainness* of the rule itself does not contribute more

SERM. towards it, than *integrity* and *impartia-*

X. *lity* in those who are to be guided by it.
 *Prejudice* will pervert and darken the plainest rule. And therefore if men apply to the study of the scriptures with minds prepossess'd in favour of any particular scheme; if they take it for granted, before they have examined, that this is the religion of the bible; all they have to do is, in the best manner they can, to *accommodate* scripture to it. By their being thus pre-determined all farther light is precluded; passages of scripture are strained, and tortured, and darkened by *unnatural* comments; because men search the scripture not to find out the sense of *that*, but to make it speak *their own* sense. But, on the contrary, if their minds are free and disengaged, and they have no concern but for truth, the rule of scripture is so plain in all essential points, that they can hardly, with an ordinary degree of judgment, mistake it. In the natural course of things, such an honest ingenuous temper, divested of all prejudice, all attachment to favourite opinions, will lead to the knowledge of every necessary truth, and secure from dangerous and hurtful errors.

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rors: 'Tis indeed the surest ground-work SERM.
and foundation of proficiency in divine X.
knowledge; without which, the greatest
abilities will serve but to *confound* and
puzzle a man the more, as they furnish a
thousand little evasions, and help him to
give plausible colours to falshood, and
consequently will carry him so much the
farther from the end proposed.

2dly, In all our searches into scripture,
let us keep this rule constantly in view,
that revelation is founded on *reason*, and
natural religion; and therefore that none
of the peculiar doctrines of revealed reli-
gion can subvert that, or contradict any
of its principles. The religion of nature
is eternal; immutable truth, of certain and
indispensable authority, and, consequent-
ly, can't be superseded, or, in the least,
altered by external revelation: And if
men had always thought of this, they
would never have entertained opinions,
upon a *pretended scripture warrant*, dis-
honourable to God, and destructive of the
very first principles of morality: They
would never, for instance, have looked
on any thing as the revealed truth of
God, which is inconsistent with his UNI-

SERM. TY, the fundamental article of all religion; never have magnified faith above virtue; or made true piety consist in outward formality; in an idle, useless superstition; nay, in a violent, injurious zeal, that tramples upon the obligations of justice and charity. They would never, from a few *obscure* passages *rigorously* interpreted, nay, from the *mere sound* of words, have conceived of the Deity as severe and implacable, slow to be appeased, but easy to be affronted; or as an arbitrary sovereign, whose will is his only law; and who, without any regard to their several qualifications, has absolutely determined the happiness of a few of his creatures, and consigned over all the rest, vastly the greater number, to irremediable and endless misery. Had men, I say, formed just notions of natural religion, and considered all its principles as of invariable and necessary truth, they could never have imagined scripture to contain such sentiments as these, which are evidently repugnant to reason; and, especially, to what the light of nature teaches concerning the unlimited goodness of the great Creator, which is so visible in

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the frame of the universe, and the general S E R M.
 course of providence. Such *injudicious* in- X.
 terpreters of scripture little consider, how
 much they reproach revelation itself by fa-
 thering those absurd doctrines upon it, as
 well as abuse their own understandings: For
 the religion of nature cannot but be *true*;
 what then is the consequence of making
 any particular revelation oppose and un-
 dermine it, but that that revelation is ne-
 cessarily *false*?

3dly, In interpreting scripture always
 regard the *general scope* and *design* of it.
 Let those who have leisure read whole
 books at once, or, at least, to the end of
 proper periods, that they may have an en-
 tire and connected view of the things con-
 tained in them. For it must give us
 but confused ideas to break off in the
 midst of a narration; or jumble together
 parts of different facts; so likewise to read
 only select portions out of epistles, and
 those, perhaps, injudiciously chosen, when
 there is *one design* pursued in the whole,
 and a continued *reference* throughout.
 Be careful likewise to attend to the *con-*
nection of the writer, and the thread of
 his reasoning. For, in all writings, *inde-*
pendent

SERM. *pendent* passages may be urged to serve all
 X. manner of purposes; by which means
 ~~~~~ the gravest and most judicious authors may  
 be forced to talk *ludicrously*, and *incon-*  
*sistently*; and the best and most useful  
 books, which are written with the strict-  
 est regard to virtue, be made to counte-  
 nance *vice* and *impiety*.

And, indeed, it has happened, that  
 the holy scriptures, of all other books,  
 have been most grossly perverted and abus-  
 ed this way. Common writings have, in  
 the main, and unless in the heat of con-  
 troversy, been treated with fairness and  
 candour enough: But the writings of the  
 Old and New Testament, by picking out  
 of them *little scraps*, and *separate porti-*  
*ons*, (which can't be understood but by  
 attending to their connection, nor urged  
 as proofs of any thing, in opposition to the  
 general view of the revelation, without  
 rendering it perfectly unintelligible and  
 useless) the sacred writings, I say, by be-  
 ing thus *mangled* and *torn to pieces*, have  
 been represented as teaching the most ab-  
 surd, nay, indeed, very impious and im-  
 moral doctrines. The building doctrines  
 therefore upon *single texts* may lead us  
 into

into great and dangerous mistakes. I might S E R M.  
illustrate this by a multitude of examples; X.  
but I would not be tedious, and therefore  
shall confine myself to one instance, *viz.* Jer. xvii.  
the words of the prophet *Jeremiah, the<sup>9</sup>*  
*heart is deceitful above all things, and des-*  
*perately wicked, who can know it?*

This passage, divided from the con-  
text, and considered as a general indepen-  
dent proposition, has been used to as strange  
a purpose as one can well imagine, *viz.* to  
prove that men are not acquainted with  
**THEMSELVES**; that tho' *self-consci-*  
*ousness* be inseparable from, and the dis-  
tinguishing excellence and privilege of their  
being rational, they are strangers to their  
own hearts, know not what their own  
views and intentions are, nor what the  
prevailing habits and dispositions of their  
minds. This hasty conclusion, I say, has  
been drawn from these words (which if it  
was applied to *civil* affairs, as it is to reli-  
gion, must create the utmost confusion)  
not only in opposition to the general sense  
and experience of mankind, but quite con-  
trary to the design of the author himself.  
This will evidently appear if we confi-  
der the connection, and the general rea-  
soning that he is pursuing. For,



SERM. For, in the 5th verse, God is introduced  
 X. as denouncing a woe against all those,  
 who fix their ultimate dependence on human power and policy. In the 7th and 8th verses is described the wisdom and happiness of trusting in the Lord, and making him our strength. Then follows the text we are considering, which by all rules of good interpretation (since there is not the least mark of the prophet's beginning *a new topic* of discourse) must be referred to the same argument, and contain another strong reason against making man our confidence; *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?* i. e. "There may be infinite  
 " *devices* and *subtilties* in the hearts of  
 " men, which thou canst not understand: While they promise thee fair,  
 " and make the warmest protestations of  
 " affection and zeal for thy service, their  
 " intentions may be the direct contrary,  
 " and their views *private* and *selfish*:  
 " Their resolutions are fickle and mutable,  
 " and many little circumstances may  
 " prevail with them to change their purposes; and so render their promises  
 " vain and delusory. Nay, 'tis possible  
 " for

“ for them to arrive at such a pitch of SERM.  
“ *premeditated* and *desperate* wickedness, X.  
“ as to endeavour, even under *friendly*  
“ pretences, to undermine thine interest.  
“ Place not therefore thy supreme and ul-  
“ timate confidence in man, but repose it  
“ in the unchangeable God ; who, as by  
“ reason of the perfect and necessary recti-  
“ tude of his nature he can’t deceive thee,  
“ so as he is absolute lord of the universe,  
“ and the uncontrollable disposer of all  
“ events, he must be able with ease to  
“ effect every thing, that is necessary for  
“ thy security and happiness.”

To the directions above-mention’d a-  
bout observing the general design of scrip-  
ture, and the connection of particular pas-  
sages, which is necessary in interpreting  
all writings whatever ; let me add, that  
’tis proper for us to make some allowances  
for the *difference* of languages, and the  
*peculiar phrases* and *idioms* used by the  
people, for whom the scriptures were *ori-*  
*ginally* and more *immediately* designed.  
I shall explain this a little by the words  
*for ever*, and *everlasting*, which are far  
from having the same force, in the sacred  
writings, as they generally have in our  
own

262 *Rules for the profitable reading*

SERM. own language. For 'tis certain that they

X. do not always signify a *strict* and *absolute* eternity, but very frequently a *limited* duration; and the sense of them is, in a great measure, to be determined by the subjects to which they are applied. Thus every one allows, that when we read of *ever-*

Hab. iii. 6 *lasting mountains*, the word means very differently from what he does when God is said to be *everlasting*. Again, when 'tis said of Christ, that *he shall reign over the*

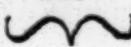
Luke i. 33 *house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end*, we are to understand no more by it, than that he shall reign to the end of the world; for *then* we are expressly inform'd by St. Paul, I Cor. xv. 24, 28. *he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father;---that God may be all in all*. In like manner, when we are told

Jude v. 7. *that Sodom and Gomorrah are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire*, nothing more is meant than a fire that made a full end of them, and was not extinguished, till those cities, with their inhabitants, were utterly consumed. In these passages, and in some others, which seldom regard things of

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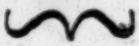


real importance, we must allow for the SERM.  
*change* of languages, and *different use* of X.  
 words; and the common people will,   
 without much difficulty, fall into the true  
 Interpretation of all passages of this kind,  
 if they follow but the natural and easy  
 method of comparing one part of scripture  
 with another.

4<sup>thly</sup>, Another rule of great impor-  
 tance is, to explain *dark figurative* passa-  
 ges, parables, metaphors, allegories, &c.  
 by such as are *plain*, and their sense  
*uncontestable*. Those parts of scripture,  
 which are express'd in the clearest and  
 most simple manner, give a complete  
 and rational account of the perfections  
 and providence of God, and a noble  
 scheme of morality. And explaining *dark*  
 passages in a book, which, it is generally  
 believed, can contain no contradictions and  
 inconsistencies, by such as are *plain* and  
*indisputable*, must be allowed to be the  
 most natural method of interpreting it.  
 And if the common people take care to  
 follow this method, and make any use of  
 their reason, they can't be misled, by the  
*peculiar stile* and *phrase* of scripture, into  
 unworthy conceptions of God, or mistake  
 the

SERM. the general nature of true religion. Whereas,  
 X. as, if they *strain* figures to their utmost height, and put parables and metaphors upon the *rack*, they may, indeed, extort *strange* senses from them, and draw the most *wild* and *extravagant* conclusions:

In *figurative* ways of speaking there is one grand point intended, which is, generally, obvious to a fair inquirer: If he goes beyond this, and argues strictly and rigorously from every circumstance, what may he not deduce from scripture this way? Thus when the conversion and sanctification of a sinner is stiled *regeneration*, and *the new creature*, the general design of these expressions is only this, that he entered upon a new kind of life, has thoroughly changed his principles and methods of acting; and is, indeed, in the temper of his mind, and prevailing dispositions, *quite another creature* from what he was before. But is it not most unaccountable, that any should strain this metaphor so prodigiously, as to make mankind mere *machines*, who can do no more towards their reformation from sin to virtue, than a dead body towards restoring  
 itself

itself to life, or a creature towards giving S E R M.  
 itself being; and, thereby, render all the X.  
 exhortations and commands of the gospel   
 to repent, and turn from our evil ways,  
*impertinent* and *trifling*? The folly of  
 this forced and unnatural method of in-  
 terpreting is clearly seen in other instances,  
 and universally allowed; for when 'tis  
 said, that *the day of the Lord so cometh*  
*as a thief in the night*, who ever imagined, I Thes.  
 upon the bare force of this metaphor, v. 2.  
 that it will be attended with injustice and  
 violence? And the true reason why men  
 think justly on the *one*, and not on the  
*other* is, that in the one case they pro-  
 ceeded *impartially*, and, being under no  
*biass*, take the natural and most obvious  
 sense of scripture; whereas, in the other,  
 their judgment is already determined in  
 favour of some *party scheme*, which they  
 take all opportunities and all advantages  
 to support.

*5thly*, I would advise those who want  
 leisure, opportunity, and, perhaps, capa-  
 city for *critical* enquiries, to read chiefly  
 the *plain* parts of scripture; those, espe-  
 cially, which describe the perfections and  
 providence of God, or contain practical  
 instructions



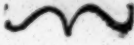
SER M. instructions, and gospel motives and en-

X. couragements to virtue; and to trouble themselves but little about doubtful passages that are only *incidental*, and have no immediate connection with the *grand design* of the revelation. For if Christianity be rightly understood in its *practical* doctrines, and as it is a *moral* rule, which, without doubt, must be the chief intention of any revelation; other obscurities, about antient customs, manners, sects, philosophy, &c. nay, about any points merely *speculative*, signify just nothing. For as God would never have given a revelation, if the errors of the world had not been of a *practical* nature, but consisted only in absurd *theories*; so differences about such things may always continue, nay, the bulk of the world may know but little about them, and yet all the ends and uses of the Christian revelation, as a standing rule, be completely answered. Those who have time, and proper abilities, may commendably employ their thoughts about these lesser matters; but others, who have neither a genius, nor opportunities for speculation,

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act wisely in not meddling with it, but SERM.  
confining themselves to more important X.  
and essential points. 

In the last place, as the great end of revelation must be to promote the practice of virtue, we learn from hence a sure rule, by which to judge of the *importance* of the several doctrines of it: We should lay no stress upon any but as it tends to promote a holy life, and upon all, just in proportion to their tendency to this great and desirable end. And, upon this foot, what will become of most of the *controversies*, that have been so furiously agitated in the Christian world, in which the *best* part of religion is not at all concerned? Learn then to employ your chief zeal about the *weightier matters of the law*, *doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God*; and be but little solicitous about speculative opinions, and matters of *doubtful disputation*. Follow *after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another*; Micah vi, 8. Rom. xiv, 19.  
For then only will you have studied the scriptures to a right purpose, when ye *have purified your souls, in obeying the truth thro' the spirit, unto unfeigned love*. James iij, 17.

SERM. of the brethren; and learned to practise  
 X. the wisdom that is from above, which is  
 first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy  
 to be intreated, full of mercy and good  
 fruits, without partiality, and without  
 hypocrisy.

I have nothing farther to add, but to  
 Acts xx. commend you to God, and to the word of  
 32. his grace, which is able to build you up,  
 and give you an inheritance among all  
 them that are sanctified.



S E R M O N





# SERMON XI.

Of Heresy.

TITUS iii. 10, 11.

*A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.*



IS surprising to think, what a SERM.  
vast influence the mere sound XI.  
of words, *artfully* manag'd, ~  
has upon the generality of  
mankind, both to confound their judg-  
ment, and inflame their passions. This  
the dealers in controversy seem to be uni-  
versally

SERM. verſally aware of, and therefore ſcarce

XI. ever fail to have recourſe to it, as the ſureſt method of engaging on their ſides the *popular* prejudices, and ruining the credit of their adverſaries. The favourite terms of reproach made uſe of againſt Chriſtianity are *enthuſiaſm*, *ſuperſtition*, *prieſt-craft*, which have a prodigious effect on weak and ſhallow minds, as long as they are apply'd in a *confuſed*, *general* way, without any diſtinct or determinate ideas; they operate like a *charm*, while proper care is taken to keep the people in the dark; but by being juſtly explain'd loſe their *magical* influence entirely, becauſe they appear not to be at all applicable to the *real* doctrines, and duties of the Chriſtian religion, but only to the *ſupplements*, *innovations*, and *corruptions* of ignorant and prejudic'd, or of deſigning and intereſted men.

And, among Chriſtians themſelves, the word *heresy*, particularly, for want of being rightly underſtood, has been, in every age, an engine of defamation and violence; by which perſons of differing ſentiments and intereſts, or of ſtrong paſſions, have vented their rage and animosity

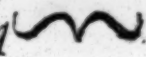
sity one against another: It has been SERM. charg'd *promiscuously* on truth and error; XI. and the best characters, both for sound knowledge, and integrity, have had the hard fate to fall under the imputation of it; and, in consequence, have been stigmatis'd as reprobates, debarr'd the privileges of Christian communion, and treated with the utmost contempt and barbarity. As this word has been manag'd by *hot* and *passionate* tempers, by *ecclesiastical politicians*, and *bigotted enthusiasts*, it has been the instrument of endless schisms and confusions: For heresy has been made to signify every thing be it right or wrong, that contradicts the *established* opinions of the times, and the outcry against it has, generally, been loudest in the most *corrupt* and *degenerate* state. Nay, private Christians, in the course of their religious debates, setting up their sense of scripture as the standard and test of truth, have mutually hereticated and denounced their anathemas against each other; by which unjust method of proceeding, they have not only discourag'd an impartial study of the scriptures, and a free inquiry



SERM. into the doctrines of the gospel; but  
 XI. have divided, and consequently weak-  
 en'd, the interests of our holy religion,  
 and expos'd it to the scorn and insults  
 of unbelievers.

As therefore the word heresy has been  
 apply'd in so *ridiculous*, and withal so *in-*  
*jurious* a manner, to the dishonour, and  
 great prejudice of the best and most  
 useful scheme of religion that ever ap-  
 pear'd in the world; as the misappli-  
 cation of it will still continue to produce  
 the same evils; and finally, as the  
 thing itself is of the highest consequence,  
 it being a heinous offence against *Chri-*  
*tian sincerity*, tho' it has been almost con-  
 stantly misunderstood, either thro' igno-  
 rance, partiality, or craft, and made to  
 signify mere errors, or only supposed er-  
 rors in *speculation*, of no importance to  
 the cause of solid virtue, or the happi-  
 ness of mankind; these being consider'd,  
 I say, it may be useful for us to enquire  
 into the true nature of it: And, for this  
 purpose, I have chosen these words of  
 St. Paul, to be the subject of the follow-  
 ing discourse, in which he so particularly  
 characterizes an heretic, that we can't

miss

miss knowing him, if we attend to his SERM. description, and gives directions to *Titus XI.* in what manner to deal with him: *A*  *man that is an heretic, &c.* And, indeed, all the other accounts we have of this matter are so clear and express, and have so little of difficulty or ambiguity in them, that 'tis scarce possible the word should be abus'd in that gross manner it has been, and perverted from its original design, if men had not consulted their own *passions* and *prejudices* more than the Holy Scriptures; and if the signification of it had not been artfully chang'd to serve *a turn*, whereby the ignorant and unwary have been impos'd on in all ages: For as these are too much under *management*, and dispos'd to speak as they are *taught*, instead of examining for themselves into the nature and reason of things, 'tis no wonder that they call every one an heretic, that is declar'd to be such by their *superiors*, those especially to whom they have resign'd the direction of their *consciences*; 'tis no wonder, that they apply to him all the bad characters which they find of heretics in the New Testament, and consequently consider him as

SERM. an infamous person, and devoted to *destruction*; or, that having given him such a monstrous and frightful dress, they hunt him down, and pursue him with *insolence* and *cruelty*. This is the natural consequence of implicit faith, and an indiscreet, intemperate zeal. But to proceed more directly to the point before us.

HERESY, in the New Testament, is, most commonly, used in an *indifferent* sense, and, but seldom, in a *bad* one. It, generally, signifies no more than a *sect* or *party* in religion. Thus we read of *the sect*, or heresy, of the Saducees; of *the sect*, or heresy, of the Pharisees; St. Paul is stil'd a *ringleader of the sect*, or heresy, of the Nazarenes; and he says of himself, that *after the strictest sect* (where the same *Greek* word is used) of the *Jewish* religion, he lived a *Pharisee*: In this last passage, particularly, nothing can be more plain than that the word has an *innocent meaning*; since the Apostle rather *commends*, than charges himself with any thing *criminal*, for having been a *Pharisee* before his conversion to the Christian faith. And we find it applied in the same manner, *Acts* xxviii. 22. where,

Acts v.

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Chap. xv.

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Ch. xxiv.

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Ch. xxvi.

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## Of Heresy.

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where, upon St. Paul's coming to Rome, SERM.  
we are told, that the *Jews*, who inha- XI.  
bited there, desired to hear his thoughts  
of Christianity, and what he had to offer  
in defense of it; for, say they, *as con-*  
*cerning this sect, or heresy, we know,*  
*that every where it is spoken against.* I  
shall mention but one text more, and  
that is 1 Cor. xi. 19. *for there must also*  
*be heresies among you, that they who are*  
*approved may be made manifest.* The  
evident design of which is, that, con-  
sidering the various tempers of men,  
their different views, passions, prejudices,  
their selfishness, ambition, vanity, and the  
like, it was natural to expect, that they  
would divide into parties about *religion*,  
as well as about *politics*, and the *civil*  
affairs of life; and that the providence  
of God wisely permitted this for the trial  
of their *integrity*, and to distinguish the  
indolent, careless, and insincere from the  
real Friends of truth, persons of an honest,  
inquisitive, and ingenuous temper.

Now, according to this account, the  
general notion of an heretic is no more  
than this, *viz.* one that sets up to be  
the *head*, or *chooses* to join himself to a  
particular

SERM. particular religious sect: I say who makes

XI. this the matter of his *choice*, because it is implied in the original signification of the word; and besides, nothing can be supposed to have any concern with religion, but what is a *voluntary* action. An heretic therefore, in a bad sense, must be one, who *knowingly* espouses a false doctrine, is *insincere* in his profession, and asserts and defends what he is *convinced* is contrary to Christianity, and, consequently one, who maintains and supports the interest of a faction, to serve some base designs. This will appear, beyond dispute, when we have considered the text, and compared it with the general tenour of the New Testament.

According to St. *Paul's* account in the Text, an heretic is not only *subverted*, or turn'd aside from the true faith; he not only entertains wrong sentiments of Christianity; but *sinneth*, i. e. doth this *wilfully*, and with an *ill* intention. Such as have merely an erroneous judgment can't be here meant, because errors of the understanding, consider'd in themselves, are not *criminal*, but naturally arise from the weakness and fallibility of human

human reason: They are, in most cases, *involuntary*, in many *unavoidable*. And, therefore, as all moral evil depends upon the error and obliquity of the will, the persons, described by the Apostle as *sinners*, must be *wilful* corrupters and opposers of the Christian religion; such whose minds are perverted by irregular dispositions and appetites; and who have resolved to sacrifice truth and virtue to the gratification of their sensual desires. And that this is the real case appears farther from hence, that the crime spoken of in the text is of such a nature, as required not *instruction*, but *admonition*; from hence, I say, it evidently follows, that the fault lay in the *will*, and not in the *understanding*. For every one knows, that the only way to rectify a mistaken judgment is by the use of reason and argument, by exposing the false grounds on which it is formed, removing prejudices, and representing matters in a clear and proper light; and that to advise a man, in an authoritative way, and without informing his understanding better, to alter his apprehension and judgment of things, and expect to make



SERM. make a convert of him merely by telling  
 XI. him he is in the wrong, be it with ever  
 so *solemn, imperious, and magisterial* an air,  
 is to the last degree absurd and ridicu-  
 lous. But he may, very rationally, be ad-  
 monished, or reprov'd, with relation to  
 those errors that depend intirely upon the  
*will*, and are owing to a *free choice*, be-  
 cause, in every such case, he must *know*  
 himself to be out of the way, and has  
 all the necessary means of a reformation  
 in his own power. St. *Paul*, therefore,  
 expressly mentions this circumstance,  
 which renders that of an heretic a com-  
 pletly bad character, *viz.* that he is  
*condemn'd of himself*, or acts against the  
 sense of his own mind, and the dictates of  
 his reason and conscience. He is one  
 that makes religion a cloak for his im-  
 moralities, and espouses and propagates  
 what he knows to be false, to promote  
 the ends of his ambition, covetousness,  
 or sensual pleasure; who, indeed, thinks  
 it his interest to retain the name of a  
 Christian, and, in that circumstance on-  
 ly, differs from a thorough and wilful  
*apostate* from Christianity, but which in-  
 curs the greater guilt may, perhaps, be  
 hard

hard to determine; for as the one rejects SERM.  
the Christian religion altogether, the o- XI.  
ther out of choice corrupts it, and opposes  
its true doctrines, even while he pretends  
to believe and reverence its authority:  
Such as these, I say, persons of such *vile*  
and *dishonest* principles, and of so *flagiti-*  
*ous* a character, are the heretics condemned  
by *St. Paul*; and, therefore, to fix it as  
a term of reproach on any, in whom there  
does not appear *hatred* of the truth, a  
*sensual* mind, and a *profligate* conscience,  
must be unchristian and scandalous.

And if we examine other passages of the  
New Testament, we shall find that they all  
concur in giving us the same idea of heresy:  
'Tis represented as *a work of the flesh*, be- Gal. v.  
cause it has its foundation in the corrupt in- 20.  
clinations of human nature. 'Tis reckon'd  
amongst the most heinous and execrable vi-  
ces, such as *adultery, idolatry, hatred, va-* Ibid.  
*riance, seditions, murders*. And heretics are  
constantly describ'd as men of no *probity* or  
*honour*, strangers to all the principles of  
virtue, and embracing such opinions only  
as were calculated for the gratification of ir-  
regular appetites, and advancing *selfish* and  
*worldly* views. Thus *St. Paul* writes to *Ti-*  
*mothy*

SERM. *mothy* concerning *Hymeneus* and *Alexander*,  
 XI. that, *having put away a good conscience*,  
 they had *made shipwreck of faith*. And of  
 those *false prophets*, of whom St. Peter  
 foretold that they should arise, *bringing in*  
*damnable heresies*, this character is given,  
 with regard to their prophaneness and im-  
 piety towards God, that they would *deny*  
*the Lord that bought them*. The person here  
 meant is not, as some apprehend, the Lord  
 Jesus Christ, but God the father, the su-  
 preme Lord and governour of the world,  
 concerning whom *Moses* put this question  
 to the *Israelites*, *is he not thy father who*  
*hath bought thee?* because the Greek word,  
 signifying *supreme* master, or ruler, is ne-  
 ver once used when Christ is spoken of,  
 but always of the Father; and, besides,  
 in the parallel text of St. *Jude*, the supreme  
 Lord is expressly *distinguished* from the  
 Lord Jesus Christ. His words are, *for*  
*there are certain men crept in, unawares,*  
*who were before, of old, ordain'd to this*  
*condemnation, ungodly men, turning the*  
*grace of our God into lasciviousness, and*  
*denying the only Lord God, and our Lord*  
*Jesus Christ*. The monstrous character of  
 these heretics may be seen throughout this  
 whole

1 Tim. i.

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2 Pet. ii.

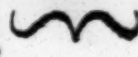
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xxxii. 6.

Ver. 4.

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whole chapter of St. *Peter*, and almost to SERM.  
the end of St. *Jude's* Epistle: And the same **XI.**  
general representation is given of them,   
in all the epistles of St. *Paul*, viz. that  
they designed not to *serve our Lord Jesus* Rom. xvi.  
*Christ but their own bellies*; and taught <sup>18.</sup>  
*things which they ought not for filthy lu-* Tit. i. 11.  
*cre's sake; speaking lies in hypocrisy, and* <sup>1 Tim. iv.</sup>  
*having their conscience seared with an hot*  
*iron.* And tho' they might, sometimes,  
put on the outward appearance of gentle-  
ness and humanity, they were still, to use  
our Saviour's phrase, but *wolves in sheeps-* Mat. vii.  
*cloathing*; and only endeavoured, under <sup>15.</sup>  
that specious pretence, to disguise their co-  
vetousness, rapine, and cruelty, till they  
might be more *conveniently* exercis'd. Ha-  
ving thus largely stated the scripture ac-  
count of heresy, suffer me to make some  
observations upon it. And,

1<sup>st</sup>, It appears from what has been said,  
that no *mere error* of the *judgment* can be  
heresy: For heresy is a high degree of  
wickedness; and necessarily supposes irre-  
gularity of the affections, and a deprav'd  
and vicious choice: Whereas erroneous  
conceptions and apprehensions of things  
are no crime at all, but natural to man-  
kind

SERM. kind in the present weak and imperfect  
 XI. state of their faculties. Nay, I think,  
 it may be affirmed, not only that no *mere*  
*error* of the *judgment* can be heresy, but  
 also that there can be no heresy, where  
 there is, properly speaking, *an error of*  
*the Judgment*: This may be owing to  
 laziness, prejudice, partial examination,  
 and other very bad causes; but heresy it  
 cannot be, as long as a man *believes* he is in  
 the *right*, however he came to work him-  
 self into such a persuasion. For an here-  
 tic, in St. *Paul's* account, is one that *knows*  
 he teaches and propagates a false doctrine;  
 who does it *deliberately*, and against the  
 clear suggestions and dictates of his con-  
 science; either from a principle of vanity,  
 and to make himself considerable as the  
 head and leader of a sect; or to advance  
 his temporal interest.

2dly, We may infer from the foregoing  
 discourse, that no *honest* man can possibly  
 be an heretic. He may, indeed, have *er-*  
*rors* (and who is there among us that has  
 not) nay, he may err in points of *impor-*  
*tance* too, but his mistakes can't be *dan-*  
*gerous* while he takes care to maintain a  
 good conscience. For human nature is, in  
 its

its very make and constitution, weak and fallible ; and considering mens different capacities, turn of understanding, education, and the like, *different*, and, consequently, *erroneous* sentiments, (for truth can't *vary* from itself, but must always be *consistent* and *uniform*) I say different, and, consequently, erroneous sentiments seem to be unavoidable. And 'tis not to be doubted, but that the wise and merciful governour of the world will make great allowances for the imperfection of our knowledge, the confusion of our reasonings, and the many little prejudices that, *insensibly*, bias and mislead the mind in this state of immaturity and darkness.

I would ask, particularly, what is the ground of our acceptance with God under the dispensation of the gospel ? Is it *absolute perfection*, or *sincerity* ? If *perfection* be required of us, an exact and adequate knowledge of all the parts of the Christian revelation, and a strict invariable obedience to the precepts of it ; or, in other words, if it be indispensably necessary to our obtaining the divine favour, that we be free from all errors of the *understanding*, and from all defects in our *moral* conduct ; the whole race of mankind must be

T

reprobated



SER M. *reprobated*, — equally and necessarily subject to condemnation. For *if we say that*

XI. *we have no sin*, and, consequently, no erroneous judgments, from whence all irre-

1 John i. 8. *gular practices proceed, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* But

if a *sincere* desire to know and do the will of God be the only condition of obtaining the Christian salvation, as it must be, in the present circumstances of mankind, unless our future happiness depends upon an *impossibility*; must not all mistakes, which are consistent with *general sincerity*, be consistent, likewise, with a state of *favour* with God? And, consequently, if we condemn those for *party differences*, in whose lives there appear all the fruits of a good conscience, and who give the greatest evidence, that can reasonably be desired, of their being honest and impartial, by a steady pursuit of virtue, and an inflexible adherence to it, under the utmost discouragements and difficulties, must not this be a *rash* and *unrighteous* judgment? To proceed one step farther, has not the scripture

1 John v. 1.

*expressly declared, that whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God?*

And shall we, then, insist on *private ar-*  
*ticles*

articles of our own, and right notions in *intri-* S E R M.  
*cate* and *perplexing* controversies; and pre- XI.  
 sumptuously pronounce all who have not  
 the same strength of understanding, and  
 the same opportunities and advantages for  
 improving in knowledge, or perhaps only,  
 the same *confidence* with ourselves, to be  
 forsaken of God, and mark'd out for de-  
 struction? The resolving these few plain  
 questions will soon shew a considerate mind  
 the folly and danger of such hard and un-  
 merciful censures, which are evil, in a high  
 degree, when they are only *rash* and *pre-*  
*cipitate*; and much more so, when they  
 proceed from *malice*, and are accompanied  
 with a *contemptuous* and *scornful* treat-  
 ment of our brethren; but most of all,  
 when those who are so forward to condemn  
 others for *speculative* errors, are, themselves,  
 chargeable with *immoral* practices; for  
 this is most impudent and monstrous *hypo-*  
*crisy*. And yet, how strange and unaccount-  
 able soever it may seem, such persons are  
 frequently the most noisy and violent ad-  
 vocates for orthodoxy; either, perhaps,  
 to *palliate* their vices, and screen them  
 from public view; or else, thinking to  
 make some *atonement* for them by a fierce

SERM. and outrageous zeal for trifles. To these

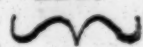
XI. the words of our Saviour are immediately directed: *Why beholdest thou the mote that*

Matt. vii. *is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not*  
3, 4, 5. *the beam that is in thine own eye? Or*

*how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*

This framing Christianity according to the model of *private opinions*, and *party peculiarities*, and imposing them on conscience under the penalty of eternal damnation, has been one of the most *successful engines* against its cause and interest, and would, probably, were it not for the superintendency of a watchful and all-powerful providence, have been, long ere this time, the *utter subversion* of our holy religion: And nothing has been the instrument of more confusion in the world, or of greater distress and injury to civil society: I would therefore, was I capable, in order to possess your minds with a *just horror*, represent the prodigious evil of it in the strongest





strongest and most pathetic terms. — Hence it is, that religion, among so many, is degenerated into *form* and *ceremony*, and that a *blind injurious zeal* supplies the place of the power of godliness. — From hence have arisen so many *absurd, inconsistent, and self-contradictory* schemes of doctrine, which have exposed our religion to contempt. — Hence also has proceeded hypocrisy, and a denying the truth, in conformity to the constitutions of men in power, in order to secure their favour, and avoid the cruel effects of their *religious vengeance*; and, consequently, secret *infidelity* under the mask of an outward profession. — And as for treachery and oppression, inveterate hatreds, bitter revilings, irreconcilable animosities, poverty and slavery, private murders and public massacres, unsettling governments by tumults and insurrections, and almost all other kinds of evil, have they not sprang from *the same root of bitterness*? — Has not the charge of heresy been thought a justification of such vile enormities, as we may defy *irreligion*, or even *atheism itself*, to exceed? — And can any of us allow ourselves in a prac-

SERM. tice, which is productive of such infinite  
 XI. disorder and misery, if we have only the  
 common seeds of *humanity* in our nature,  
 much less if we regard the honour of the  
*Christian religion*?

3dly, If heresy be an error of the *will*,  
 and such only can be guilty of it who  
 are *condemn'd of themselves*, how can we  
 certainly know, in most cases at least,  
 whether a man be an heretic or not? Let  
 each of us put this question to himself im-  
 partially, and if we can't answer it to our  
 satisfaction, let us, however, learn thus  
 much from our ignorance, to be *modest* in  
 the censures we pass upon others. Indeed,  
 in the first age of Christianity, when the  
 extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost  
 were communicated, of which one was  
 the gift of *discerning spirits*, this matter  
 might be more easily decided. And *Titus*,  
 particularly, to whom St. *Paul* directs the  
 advice in the text, can't be suppos'd, con-  
 sidering his character and office, to have  
 been without these powers. But what  
 rule have we, now these extraordinary il-  
 luminations and assistances are *ceased*, by  
 which to conduct ourselves in inquiries of  
 this nature?

1 Cor. xii.  
 10.

If

If it be said, that such wicked deceiv-<sup>SERM.</sup>  
 ers are, generally, *known by their fruits*, <sup>XI.</sup>  
 and that their vitious lives will shew us  
 by what views they are acted, and the vile  
 design of their imposture: I answer, that,  
 even upon this supposition, I should think  
 it better that they be rejected for their  
*immorality*, which is notorious and pal-  
 pable, than for *heresy*, of which, perhaps,  
 we can't so certainly judge. But what if  
 they are so cautious as to keep clear of all  
*open vices*, and affect an air of *sanctity*,  
 in order the more effectually to secure their  
 end; in such cases as these, I say, what  
 can we do, be they ever so wicked in *prin-*  
*ciple* and *intention*, but leave them to God  
 the supreme and only judge of conscience?  
 And since 'tis so difficult for us, in most  
 instances, certainly to judge of heresy,  
 why should we be forward to charge it on  
 our brethren, for every *trifling difference*  
 of their sentiments from ours? And, above  
 all, why should we be so *unrighteous* as to  
 impute it to men of *honest* principles, and  
*exemplary* lives, who, as has been shewn,  
 are quite the reverse of the heretics men-  
 tion'd in the New Testament; and, if St.  
*Paul's* authority be of any weight, cannot  
 possibly have incurr'd that guilt? But



SERM. But after all, the truths which they deny are so clear, and supported by such evidence, as necessarily to approve themselves to every honest and impartial inquirer; and therefore you are positive, that, notwithstanding their seeming piety, and strictness of outward morals, there is a *latent* corruption in their hearts, and they are influenced by some evil affection or other, tho' it does not appear *publicly*; either by a love of singularity, pride, ambition, &c. or are under the power of some vitious prejudice. This is constantly said by *bigots* and *enthusiasts*, and especially by such as are themselves most in the wrong, notwithstanding the most solemn and repeated declarations of their opponents to the contrary, and, consequently, as it will *serve* for *either* side of *any* question, can have no effect on sober and considerate minds, but will be look'd upon as the result of *passion* and *partiality*. But besides, why are we so conceited of our own understandings? Are we infallibly sure that we are in the right? Modesty forbids us directly to assert this, tho' all such reasonings necessarily imply it: Or if we were, would it not be much more excusable to

suppose

suppose our neighbour's judgment weaker than ours, than to reproach his honesty? I shall only add,

SERM.  
XI.  
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In the fourth and last place, that tho' it be a point of great nicety to judge of heresy in particular instances, the persons who come *nearest* the character of the old heretics are *violent party-men*, who confine Christianity to their own faction, and excommunicate all that take the liberty to differ from them; the *rigid imposers* of human schemes of doctrine, and modes of worship, as *essential* branches of religion, and *laws binding conscience*; these, I say, are most like the heretics condemn'd in scripture, notwithstanding their insolence and presumption. The common people, indeed, who help to encourage and support this spiritual tyranny, may be *innocent deluded* enthusiasts; but the first *contrivers*, and the *conducters* of it, especially when it appears to have a direct tendency to wealth, grandeur, and luxury, may justly be suspected of *base* and *irregular* views; or, in the language of St. Paul, to be *men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth*, who suppose *that gain is godliness*. A turbulent, factious, and persecuting spirit is

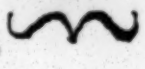
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SERM. one of the *surest marks* of heresy. And

XI. when the substance of religion is placed
 in trifling speculations, *which* have no manner of connection with virtue and morality, in abstruse incomprehensible mysteries, or in outward shew and ceremony, we may certainly conclude, that if this does not proceed from a very *weak head*, it must spring from a *dishonest heart*.

In order, therefore, to keep at the *utmost distance* from heresy, let us be modest and charitable in our censures, and not forward to fasten the infamy of it upon others. Let us fix on what party we will, even the *worst* and most *erroneous*, and we shall find the greatest reason to believe, that there are in it many persons of real probity and virtue, notwithstanding the *absurdity* or *dangerous tendency* of their principles: And therefore to condemn whole bodies, in the *gross*, merely for their *distinctive opinions*, without considering that we ourselves may be mistaken, or making proper allowances, with respect to others, for the fallibility of human understanding, for prejudices of education, and the particular disadvantages they may labour under, is not only a high strain of *pride* and *arrogance*;

it

it not only argues great ignorance of hu-^{SERM.}
 man nature; but is contrary to all the **XI.**
 principles of *justice, truth, and goodness,* 
 which, both the natural reason of our
 minds, and the Christian revelation incul-
 cate, as of indispensable authority, and in-
 finitely preferable to the most sound and
orthodox faith, and the largest extent of *spe-*
culative knowledge. For *tho' I understand*
all mysteries, and all knowledge, and tho' ^{1 Cor. xiii}
I have all faith, so that I could remove ^{2, 4, 5, 7.}
mountains, and have not charity, I am
nothing. Charity vaunteth not itself, is
not puffed up, doth not behave itself un-
seemly;—thinketh no evil;—believeth
all things, hopeth all things. Now the ^{Rom. xv.}
God of patience and consolation grant you ^{5, 6, 7.}
to be like-minded, one towards another,
according to Christ Jesus; that ye may,
with one mind, and one mouth, glorify God,
even the father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ
also hath receiv'd us, to the glory of God.



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SERMON XII.

Of SCHISM.

I COR. xii. 25.

That there should be no Schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another.



HAVING, in my last discourse, SERM. considered and explained the XII. nature of *heresy*, I intend, in this, to treat of *schism*, its almost inseparable companion. It must indeed seem very strange to every one, who is acquainted with the mild and amiable spirit of Christianity, that the pro-

SERM. professors of a religion, which so strictly
 XII. enjoins gentleness, moderation, and uni-
 versal charity, should be so forward to
 divide and crumble into *parties*, and op-
 pose one another with so much *rage* and
violence: This is quite unnatural as we
 are *men*, united by the bond of one com-
 mon nature, one common interest; but
 much more out of character as we are
Christians, whose peculiar distinction from
 professors of all other religions, if we act
 upon the principles that true Christianity
 inspires, will be mutual forbearance, har-
 mony and peace. But yet the matter of
 fact is uncontestable, and won't admit of
 any evasion. Selfishness, pride, the desire
 of dominion, a tyrannical imposing spirit,
 and sometimes perhaps (for I fear that
 has been but seldom the case) mere pre-
 judice void of any direct ill design, have
 occasioned as great and dangerous factions
 in the *church*, as were ever fomented, by
 the same bad causes, against the Security
 and peace of *civil government*. The
 Christian society has been split into infinite
divisions and *subdivisions*, of separate and
 inconsistent interests, excommunicating,
 reviling, and almost always, when they
 had

had it in their power, *persecuting* each other ; by which the common cause has been exposed and weakned ; and Christianity itself, which is most admirably adapted to civilize mankind, to calm and soften boisterous and rugged tempers, and promote universal order and happiness, has been the means of irritating and inflaming their passions, and by a most strange and melancholy perversion of it, the source of discord, confusion, and misery.

And what is it that has been the *main subject* of the most bitter, uncharitable, and outrageous contentions ? That has rais'd so many *factions* under the name of Christian societies ? And not only destroy'd the peace and communion of the church, but in many cases, broke through all the ties of friendship, natural affection, and common humanity ? — Have these evils sprung from a zeal for the eternal and unchangeable obligations of *mortality* ? — From a concern for *justice, truth, and mercy*, or an emulation to excel in *substantial* and *useful* virtue ? — Quite the contrary. Almost all the schisms and disturbances that have happen'd in the

SERM. the Christian world (and *church history*
 XII. furnishes us with a pretty large cata-
 ~~~~~logue) have been about *mere trifles*, things  
 of very little consequence to true Chris-  
 tianity, and often-times repugnant and  
 dishonourable to it; such as, submission  
 to *ecclesiastical* authority, the belief of  
*mysteries* of which we have no ideas, and  
 conformity to rites and ceremonies of  
*human* institution, which serve but to en-  
*cumber* and *debase* the rational worship of  
 the Deity, and render it *weak* and *supersti-*  
*tious*. Thus we find, that very soon af-  
 ter the Apostolic age, a *little insignificant*  
 and *senseless* controversy, about the day of  
 keeping *Easter*, occasioned a terrible con-  
 fusion and schism in the Christian church;  
 the *western* churches separating, and re-  
 nouncing communion with the *eastern*,  
 for several years together. And have  
 not some of the hottest disputes since  
 been about the *secret decrees* of God, and  
 metaphysical subtilties relating to his *es-*  
*sence*, and manner of *subsisting*, about the  
*validity* or *nullity* of ministerial ordina-  
 tions, praying with, or without a *form*,  
*bowings*, *crossings*, *garments*, and other  
 outward modifications of piety, which are  
 but



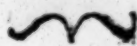
but the *circumstantials*, and very inconsiderable ones, at best, of religion; and can't, in my judgment, be reckon'd *essential*, or even *important* branches of any religion that is fit for mankind to observe, or their maker to require, without entertaining very *low* thoughts of the wisdom of God, and a most *contemptible* opinion of human nature. And since these divisions among Christians are such a reproach to their character, and have been urg'd as objections against the excellent doctrine they profess, which is the most *benevolent* and *peaceable* that ever appear'd in the world; since they have produc'd, and will always necessarily produce, the most mischievous and fatal effects, injurious to true piety and virtue, and to the interest of civil society; and finally, since, in almost every controversy, we find both the contending parties forward to charge the *schism* on each other, as indeed it is too natural, when the passions are strongly engag'd, for both to run *unwarrantable lengths* in the heat of their animosity and opposition; upon these accounts, I say, it must be of equal advantage to us to form right notions of

U

schism,

S E R M.

XII.



SERM. schism, as of heresy : That, on the one  
 XII. hand, we may never incur the guilt of a  
 ~~~~~ crime so aggravated, (when it is at all a  
 crime) and attended with such destructive
 consequences ; nor, on the other, be at all
 alarm'd at it, when it is only *a mere name*,
 and *brand of infamy*.

Schism, in its original signification, is
 no more than a *rent*, or a *division*. Ac-
 cordingly in all the passages of the New
 Testament, except the text, where the words
 σχισμα and σχισματα are used, they are thus
 rendered by our translators. So we read,
 in one of our Saviour's allusions, that a
piece of new cloth, put to an old garment,
taketh from the garment, and the rent is
made worse. We read likewise of a *divi-*
sion, or schism, *among the people*, i. e. of
 their entertaining different sentiments of
 Christ. Several other passages might be
 added, but these two are sufficient to shew
 that the word schism, as well as heresy, is
 us'd in an *indifferent* sense ; and that the
 lawfulness, or unlawfulness of it, is en-
 tirely to be determined by *circumstances*.
 Common use, indeed, in our own language,
 always affixes to the term an idea of *guilt* ;
 and therefore I am obliged in the follow-
 ing

Mat. ix.
16.

John vii.
43.

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ing discourse, in order to adapt it to modern disputes, to consider it as a *criminal* XII. *vitious* thing, and shall endeavour to state the true notion of it under that character.

In general, then, there can be no such thing as schism, but in cases where there is an obligation to *unity* and *communion*, so that in order to denote the nature of it justly, we must find out some *center* of union, which is common to all Christians: And this must be either *uniformity* of sentiment in matters of speculative belief, or in external modes of worship and discipline; or else, if it be unreasonable to expect either of these, the only center of unity that remains is *charity* and *mutual forbearance*, notwithstanding lesser differences, where there is an assent to all the necessary principles of Christian faith *, and the profession of Christianity is prov'd to be sincere by a regular and virtuous life.

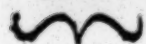
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* If it be ask'd, what these necessary principles are? The answer is easy, *viz.* that unless we will leave room for multiplying articles of faith *infinitely*, they can be no other than what are expressly requir'd to be believ'd, in order to our obtaining the Christian salvation. And of this

SERM. Let us examine this matter distinctly.

XII. And,



I. As for *uniformity* of sentiment in matters of *speculative belief*, that can never be the *common center* of Christian unity, because it is in the nature of things *impossible*. For in order to this, all mankind must have exactly the same strength of understanding, the same advantages, the same manner of education, the same passions, prejudices, and interests; but as there

this kind we find nothing in the whole New Testament but that *single* article, that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," including in it the belief of his miracles, and resurrection, and the extraordinary powers communicated to the Apostles, which are the standing evidence of the truth of the Gospel. There are two passages, in St. *John's* first epistle, so distinct, and full to this purpose, that they can't be evaded by any arts of criticism, but what will confound and darken the plainest sense of words, and destroy the very use of language: *Whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God*; chap. iv. 15. and again, *Whoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God*, chap. v. 1. So that every one that assents to this fundamental truth, and sincerely endeavours to understand the revelation, and act according to it, must be a true Christian, and intitled to the *friendship* and *communion* of Christians; and to deny him this privilege, on *whimsical* notions of the importance, or necessity of particular schemes, not *expressly* warranted and supported by scripture, is unjust, antichristian, and *schismatical*.

there is an almost *infinite variety* in all S E R M. these respects, differences of opinion will XII. necessarily arise; and the contrary can't be hop'd for by any one that knows human nature, much less can it be required by the infinite wisdom of our supreme governor. Besides, if all Christians must concur in the same way of thinking about every controversy in religion, whose opinion shall prevail; and be made the *public standard*? — Are the *majority* to decide for us? — How shall we determine, without collecting the vote of every individual, who are the *majority*? — The greatest numbers in our own, or any other particular Country, may be the *minor* part with respect to the whole body of Christians; and, besides, the *real sense* of the people may be very different from establish'd forms, and in many instances, from their own public profession. But allowing we could settle this first and most essential point, which, in truth, can hardly be settled, are the majority always in the *right*? Or must we, for the sake of uniformity, profess (*believe* we cannot) against truth and reason? Will not this make all religion *dissimulation* and *hypocrisy*?

SERM. *crisy*? Will it not drive us back to all

XII. the errors and superstitions of *Popery*?

W Nay, will it not oblige us to renounce even Christianity itself for the *Mahometan* imposture, or *Pagan* idolatry, both of which, if the vote of the *majority* is to determine, seem to stand upon a much better foundation? This is undoubtedly the point in which this principle must terminate, if pursued through all its just and natural consequences; for the *majority* of Christians have no more a right to judge for the *whole body* of Christians, than the *greatest part* of mankind for *all the rest* of mankind.

But if *uniformity* of opinion can't be secured in this way; shall we not be govern'd by the most *learned* and *pious* Christians, who are neither influenced by irregular passion, nor sway'd by criminal prejudice, and have examin'd all the parts of religion with the greatest exactness and impartiality? I answer, that who are *really* the most learned and pious will be matter of endless dispute, and can never be *certainly* fix'd. Or if it could, there is still this objection against admitting their judgment as a *decisive* rule, that they

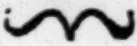
are

are *fallible* as well as others ; and have SERM.
XII.
frequently asserted and maintain'd such principles, as derogate highly from the honour of God, and are of vast disservice to religion. — Must we then give up the direction of our faith to our *spiritual instructors*, the *governours* of the church ? This will leave us in equal confusion and uncertainty. — For who are they ? — If the *ecclesiastics* of every nation are to appoint and settle the *national* faith, there is likely to be the same *variety* and *inconsistency* in it, as if it was left to every man's own private reason ; or if the greatest number are to fix the *general* faith of Christians, we must give up our *understandings*, our *senses*, our *humanity*, for the follies and cruelties of *Popish* superstition. Or finally, if we are to submit to the religion of the *civil magistrate*, exactly the same consequences will follow from it ; the same inconsistency of principles and practices, all suppos'd to be essential parts of the one true religion (which by the way, is making religion itself a *contradiction*.) For this way of establishing *uniformity* of opinion under one government will, in different countries, as

SERM. necessarily establish a *variety*; and be,
 XII. withal, of equal, nay of much greater
 ~~~~~ service to *Mahometanism*, and *Heathenism*,  
 than to the cause of Christianity. It ap-  
 pears then from what has been said, that  
 to endeavour to bring all mankind to the  
 same sentiments in matters of religious con-  
 troversy is an *absurd, romantic* scheme,  
 and represents religion as nothing else but  
 outward *formality, artifice, and craft*,  
 or a mere piece of *state-convenience* and  
*policy*.

The same may be said of *uniformity* in  
*external modes* of worship and discipline,  
*viz.* that this, likewise, cannot be a ne-  
 cessary term of Christian communion.  
 For it will be altogether as difficult to  
 determine, who are to settle external rites  
 and ceremonies, and forms of church-go-  
 vernment, as articles of speculative be-  
 lief; and the very same wild consequences  
 will follow, from allowing it to the *ma-  
 jority*, the *church*, or the *civil magistrate*,  
 in one case, as in the other. Besides, the  
 lawfulness, expediency, or divine autho-  
 rity of any particular form is as much a  
 matter of *private* opinion and speculation,  
 as the truth or falshood of doctrinal pro-  
 positions;

positions: And therefore, it is as natural SERM.  
to expect a *variety* of sentiments about it. **XII.**

Indeed the plain truth of the case lies   
here. Every man has an *unalienable* right  
to judge, for himself, what principles are  
just and rational, and what form of reli-  
gion is most acceptable to God. It is ab-  
solute nonsense to talk of any thing in re-  
ligion, that is not entirely founded on in-  
ward *conviction*, and *choice*. If we ex-  
clude this, and suppose that private per-  
sons are bound to submit to a *public* con-  
science, and to *establisb'd* notions of order  
and decency, we build religion on the *ruins*  
of human reason; and may indeed make  
it *any thing*, be it ever so weak and tri-  
fling, ever so much mischievous and hurt-  
ful, ever so contrary to the moral perfec-  
tions of God, and the immutable princi-  
ples of truth and righteousness. And at  
this rate is it worthy *a wise* man's con-  
cern? Can it deserve to be *supported*?  
Would it not rather be for the interest of  
mankind, if it was absolutely *banish'd* the  
world? On the contrary, if it be (as it  
must if it be any thing at all) a *personal*  
thing, and all are at liberty to judge and  
determine



SERM. determine for themselves, in every circum-

XII. stance, what is fit and proper; and if  
 Christianity makes no alteration in mens  
*natural rights*; the inference to be made  
 from hence is most obvious and undenia-  
 ble, viz. that no mere difference of opi-  
 nion, either in matters of speculative be-  
 lief, or about outward forms of worship  
 and discipline, can destroy necessary Chri-  
 stian unity, which, upon every other sup-  
 position, is a *chimera*, an absolute *impos-*  
*sibility*.

If this be allow'd, it may be ask'd,  
 what will become of *public order*? I an-  
 swer, what is *public order*? It can't be  
*uniformity* in matters of mere opinion, for  
 that has been shewn to be impossible;  
 and there will be no more *disorder* from  
 a variety of sentiments in religion, than  
 from different schemes of philosophy,  
 politics, oeconomy, or different rules of  
 civil life; nay, than from the difference  
 of mens faces, natural tempers, circum-  
 stances, or the infinite variety that ap-  
 pears in the constitution of the universe,  
 which yet, upon the whole, is perfectly  
*harmonious and beautiful*. The right or-

der

der of things with respect to mankind, SERM.  
 who are intelligent beings, and indu'd XII.  
 with moral powers, is, when *every indi-*  
*vidual* exercises his reason, and forms his  
 notions of religion for himself, and the  
 more strictly this *order* is preserv'd, dif-  
 ferences, in lesser matters, will be more  
 unavoidable and necessary.— They are  
 only *imaginary* rules or order of human  
 contrivance, perverting the *natural order*  
 that God has establish'd, with which such  
 differences are at all inconsistent.

Let me add to this, that a *variety* of  
 sentiments in religion, while moderation  
 and mutual charity are maintained, can  
 do no hurt, as well as create no confusion;  
 whereas an attempt to introduce *public*  
*uniformity* and the imposing *unscriptural*  
 terms of communion, have been a con-  
 stant source of schisms in the church, and  
 as long as they continue, will infallibly  
 keep alive a spirit of animosity, and per-  
 petuate contention and violence.

And finally, when there is a *difference*  
 of opinions, and a *variety* of outward  
 forms, this is just such a state of things as  
 a wise man would expect if all were *honest*  
 and

SERM. and *impartial* inquirers ; whereas if one

XII. *sett* of principles, and the *same scheme* of worship and discipline, not diversify'd in the minutest circumstance, were universally to prevail, it would not look like *human nature* ; it would have nothing of the appearance of *sincerity* ; and, consequently, must lead an indifferent spectator to conclude, that religion was all *complaisance, courtliness, and carnal policy*, and did not spring from a conviction of the understanding, or a free deliberate choice.

From what has been said, I would make a few observations relating to the nature and guilt of schism, and so conclude. And,

1<sup>st</sup>. It appears, that let there be ever so many *differences* amongst Christians, as long as *mutual charity* is preserv'd, there cannot be the guilt of schism. Even the church of *Rome*, so corrupt as it is, and so grossly as it has perverted the doctrines and institutions of the Christian religion, would not be *schismatical*, if it did not confine Christianity to its own faction, and make party-peculiarities necessary

terms



if one terms of communion; and thereby re-  
 ume of ounce all friendship and unity with  
 y'd in Christians of a different persuasion. A  
 niver- man that holds the common faith of the  
 k like Gospel, leads a holy life, behaves peace-  
 ing of bly, and has charity for all, notwith-  
 con- standing the little varieties by which they  
 spec- are distinguished from each other, does not  
 as all differ from any church so far as it is form'd  
 policy, in the *essential* principles of Christianity;  
 on of but only takes that liberty of judging  
 berate or himself, which *reason* allows, and *re-*  
 elation confirms to him; a liberty to  
 would differ from *fallible* expositions of scrip-  
 to the ture, from *civil* constitutions, or *ecclesi-*  
 con- stical ordinances of rather less authority.  
 e ever For if any person's judgment ought to be  
 ns, as submitted to as a *public* standard, it should  
 there certainly be that of the civil magistrate;  
 en the who, generally speaking, must have less  
 s, and temptation, than those who pretend to a  
 trines *distinct* and *independent* jurisdiction, to in-  
 ligion, troduce such schemes of religion as are  
 d not injurious to mankind, and destructive of  
 ctions, he security, order, and happiness of so-  
 cessary ciety. So that *alienation* of affection,  
 terms and a *turbulent, excommunicating* spirit,  
 are

SERM. are the essence of schism, and not mere

XII. difference of opinion ; not the use of *different* ceremonies, or of *no* ceremonies at all ; or joining ourselves to any particular religious communion. For, according to St. Paul, (who, in several passages blames the *Corinthians* for divisions or schism among themselves in the same community) this crime may be committed when there is no separation from a particular church : And consequently they that *dissever uncharitably*, whether they belong to one, or form distinct worshipping assemblies (and they alone) are schismatics and to throw the odium and infamy of this character on any *peaceable* denomination of Christians, is mere scandal and calumny.

2dly, Differences among Christians are not only *innocent*, while unity of affection is preserved, but there are many cases, in which a separation from a particular church is absolutely *necessary*. This is universally allow'd when its worship is *idolatrous* or *superstitious*, or it requires *unlawful* terms of communion and therefore I shall insist no longer upon it, but only observe, that what is at

idolat

merely idolatrous or superstitious worship, or what are *really* unlawful terms of communion, can't be determin'd by any *public* authority, but must be left to the *private* judgment of every man's mind. And, consequently,

In the third place, none, who are truly *honest*, who are not sway'd by irregular passions, or vicious prejudices, but, upon a deliberate impartial inquiry, according to their capacity and advantages, think themselves oblig'd, in *conscience*, to dissent from their brethren; no such persons as these, I say, can possibly incur the guilt of *Schism*: For this would be to make *honesty itself* a crime; and at the same time that we suppose it a man's duty to act according to the light and directions of his conscience, to reproach and condemn him for it. Particular scruples may indeed be *groundless*, the judgment we form, and upon which we take the liberty to separate from others, may be *erroneous*; but are there no allowances to be made for the weakness and fallibility of human reason? Is not this every honest man's *misfortune*, rather than his *fault*? Will not the merciful



SERM. ciful governour of the world overlook it?

XII. And shall not we treat such a one with candour and humanity, notwithstanding his *involuntary* errors? — Or shall we run him down with reproach and infamy? — If men of real integrity may be schismatics purely for being mistaken, and having an over-strict and scrupulous conscience, schism must be perfectly *innocent*, because it always has been, and ever will be, in innumerable cases, *unavoidable*. Or if it be still insisted on that such differences are highly criminal, and displeasing to God, tho' they are not, at all, the matter of our *choice*, this will be to make guilt and misery necessary; which, if it was really a doctrine of Christianity, must be such a strong *intrinsic* mark of imposture, so absolutely contrary to all our notions of the wisdom, and justice, not to say the goodness of God, that no miracles, how *great* or *numerous* soever, would be sufficient to establish its authority.

But is it not our duty to sacrifice a few scruples for the *peace* of the church? — Not one. — For if the peace of the church can't be secur'd without giving up conscience

conscience, honour, and integrity, it is SERM.  
 better it be *disturbed*; better there were XII.  
*no church at all*, than that the cause of  
 true piety and virtue should suffer by it.  
 Besides, how is this peace broken by the  
 scrupulous dissent of an honest mind from  
 establish'd opinions, and forms of wor-  
 ship, while he behaves *charitably*, and is  
 content with enjoying his own liberty,  
 without *insulting* and *censuring* others?  
 Nothing, surely, can hinder, but the  
*church* may be at peace as well as the  
*state*, notwithstanding a variety of senti-  
 ments and manners, unless it be that the  
*imposing party*, who call themselves the  
 church, are resolv'd there shall be no  
 peace till all submit to their authority,  
 and comply with their humours and pre-  
 judices; till they have brought about an  
 uniformity in *trifles*, that have not the  
 least relation to true Christianity; which  
 is a *monstrous* attempt in itself, and, if  
 ever it prevails, will probably banish re-  
 ligion and virtue out of the world, to  
 make way for outward form and hypo-  
 crisy. I may add, that the *modesty* of  
 such persons is very extraordinary, as well

SERM. as their inclination to an harmony and  
 XII. union with their brethren, who can de-  
 fire *them* to act against their consciences  
 for the sake of peace, *i. e.* in other words,  
 only to silence their own unreasonable  
 clamours, who are determined to be satisfi-  
 fy'd on no softer terms; and yet refuse to  
 abate a few *indifferent* ceremonies, (which  
 are of no use in religion but to engender  
 strife and variance, and which they have  
 no pretence of *conscience* for keeping) to  
 remove offence from honest minds, and  
 thereby restore the public tranquillity.  
 In all such differences as these, if there  
 be really the guilt of schism, it will not  
 fall on men of *scrupulous integrity*, who  
 cannot, without forfeiting their virtue,  
 comply with what is requir'd of them;  
 but on the *rigid imposers* of human  
 schemes, who by their stiffness cause the  
 division, and all the rancour and animosity  
 that attends it \*.

Nay,

\* It may be thought, perhaps, that, in some things, I  
 have confounded heresy with schism, and schism with  
 heresy. I think it proper therefore, just to observe, that  
 tho' the two ideas are really distinct, so that a man may  
 espouse



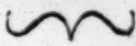
Nay, even tho' the terms of commu-<sup>SERM.</sup>  
 nion, with any particular church, are <sup>XII.</sup>  
 allow'd to be *lawful*, it does not from  
 thence follow, that I am oblig'd to wor-  
 ship statedly with it ; but if I think the  
 constitution and manner of worship, in  
 other churches, more *expedient* and *use-*  
*ful*, I am certainly at full liberty, as a  
*man*, and a *christian*, to join with them.  
 My differing from the *majority* does not  
 break the peace, if I act with moderation  
 and candour ; I do nothing but what I  
 have a *right* to do, and am not answer-  
 X 2 able

espouse the interests of a particular faction against true  
 Christianity, without going so far as to renounce commu-  
 nion with other Christians, and therefore without being a  
*schismatic* ; and on the contrary, may be the cause of very  
 unnecessary, uncharitable, and fatal divisions in the church,  
 and yet not act against conscience, nor, consequently, be,  
 in the sense of St. Paul, an *heretic* ; notwithstanding, I say,  
 that these things may *possibly* happen, 'tis undeniable that  
 both these crimes *frequently* meet in the same characters,  
 and natural to expect that they will, *generally*, go together.  
 And this I take to be a sufficient justification of what I  
 have advanc'd, *viz.* that a *violent party spirit*, that puts men  
 upon *excommunicating* and *unchristianing* the rest of the  
 world, is the true nature and highest guilt of *schism* ; and  
 for the reasons alledged, under the last head of the fore-  
 going discourse, one of the most *suspicious* marks of *heresy*.

SERM. able for *accidental* consequences; but the

XII. whole guilt of them must ly at their door, who take occasion, from an *innocent* circumstance, to foment a spirit of *faction* and *discord*. Not that I am against a *compliant* temper, in order to reconcile religious differences; but there is no reason that the compliance should be all on *one side*. We ought not to submit too *tamely*, for fear of establishing *arbitrary* power; and I can't but think that it may be of great use to stand up against unwarrantable incroachments and impositions, for the sake of the *common rights* of mankind, which are thereby invaded. But when those who separate become censorious and rigid, when they think of themselves as the only Christians, and confine their affection and esteem to persons of their own sentiments and party, tho' their *separation* might be justified, if they had conscience to plead, their *uncharitableness* makes them schismatics: So that as there are cases, in which only *one side* is guilty of schism, there are others in which *both* are chargeable with it, the imposers of human forms, and those

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those who dissent from them; *viz.* when SERM.  
XII. they condemn, reproach and uncharitably refuse communion with each other. 

Upon the whole, would we avoid the guilt both of *heresy* and *schism*? — Let us be *honest* and *peaceable*. — In all the differences which we may have with our brethren, let us act with moderation, and maintain an humble, charitable, condescending temper. — Tho' they may require such things of us, as may hinder our joining with 'em in *their* communion, let us keep open *our own*; and be ready to receive *sincere* Christians of *every* denomination. — And when we have done all, that is in our power, to *preserve* or *restore* peace, we may patiently bear the abuses of *slandrous* tongues; and leave bigots, and the advocates for church-power and imposition, to the *tortures* of their own *narrow*, *gloomy*, and *restless* minds, and the *contempt* they will certainly meet with, from all the *rational*, *good natured*, and *ingenuous* part of mankind.





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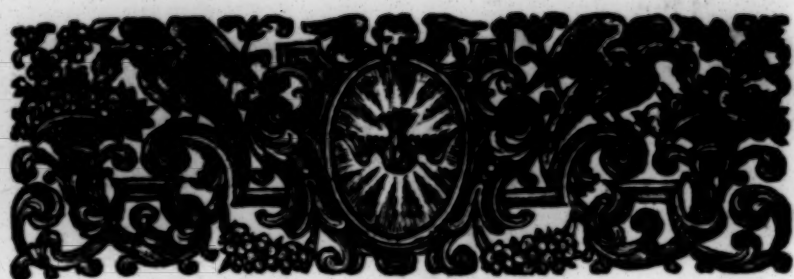
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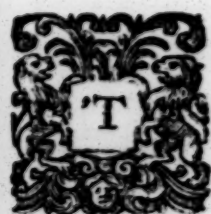
## SERMON XIII.

Of the pleasures of a religious life.

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PROV. iii. 17.

*Her ways are ways of pleasantness;  
and all her paths are peace.*



THESE words are part of SERM. Solomon's description of the **XIII.** advantages of *wisdom*, or true religion, which, contrary to the general method of this book (compos'd for the most part of independent sentences) he pursues in a connected discourse. He begins the chapter with recommending a strict regard to the rules of virtue from this

X 4      consideration,

322 *Of the pleasures of a religious life.*

SERM. consideration, that 'tis the most likely way  
 XIII. to secure *esteem* and *influence*, and a *long*,  
 happy, honourable life: The same argu-  
 ment is resumed at the 13th verse; and  
 the whole is wrought up with so much  
*beauty* and *elegance*, that I choose to give  
 it in the language of the wise author him-  
 self: *Happy is the man that findeth wis-*  
*dom, and the man that getteth understand-*  
*ing. For the merchandize of it is better*  
*than the merchandize of silver, and the*  
*gain thereof than fine gold. She is more*  
*precious than rubies; and all the things*  
*thou canst desire are not to be compared un-*  
*to her. Length of days is in her right*  
*hand; and in her left hand riches and hon-*  
*our. Her ways are ways of pleasantness;*  
*and all her paths are peace.* I shall only  
 add by way of introduction, that if the ar-  
 gument from *pleasure* appears to be on the  
 side of religion, it may be hoped its effica-  
 cy will be *universal*; since a desire of hap-  
 piness is an *inextinguishable* principle in  
 human nature, and one of the most power-  
 ful motives, by which the bulk of man-  
 kind are determin'd. In my following dis-  
 course, I shall

I. Premise



- I. Premise a few things, very briefly, for explaining and illustrating the observation contained in the text. And then, which is the chief part of my design, proceed to show,
- II. The *peculiar excellency* of the pleasures of religion and virtue.

The *first* thing that I would premise is, that what is here said of the pleasures of religion supposes that persons are, in some degree, *inured* to the practice of it, and have a virtuous disposition and turn of mind: For without this there can be no more a taste of *divine* and *moral* pleasures, than of *animal* gratifications without the senses. Every pleasure must have its faculty of *perceiving*, suited and adapted to it. And therefore to those who have led a dissolute irregular life, the ways of religion are at first ungrateful and burthensome; because they not only oppose the current of the animal passions, but stubborn and inveterate habits; and so oblige them to offer, for some time at least, a kind of *violence* to nature. But when corrupt appetites

324 *Of the pleasures of a religious life.*

SERM. tites are subdued, vitious prejudices re-  
 XIII. mov'd, and contrary principles fixed with-  
 in us, then religion is *easy*, and the duties  
 of it are *delightful*. And the pleasures of  
 piety, as will hereafter be shewn, are be-  
 yond comparison the most excellent that  
 human nature is capable of; suited to its  
 dignity, worthy its exalted capacities,  
 substantial and durable; so that when a  
 man comes to practice it with *freedom*, he  
 begins to enjoy himself, and his noble fa-  
 culties in their right order, and lives in a  
 manner agreeable to his high original, and  
 the design of his creation. Nay, even the  
*controuling* licentious inclinations, as 'tis a  
*rational*, *generous*, and *manly* action, must  
 of consequence, notwithstanding the trou-  
 ble and mortification that attends it, afford  
 much greater and more sublime satisfaction  
 to the mind, than any that can spring from  
 an *indulgence* of them. Again,

2dly. In interpreting *Solomon's* observa-  
 tion we must except *extraordinary* cases;  
 as we are oblig'd to do with respect to  
 many other general propositions, which are  
 only suppos'd to hold true in the common  
 course of things. The case, for example,

of

*Of the pleasures of a religious life.* 325

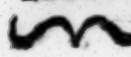
of *violent persecution*, an evil indeed, that, SERM.  
upon the whole, happens but seldom, and XIII.  
may be avoided in part, even when a spi-  
rit of oppression prevails, by a discreet  
and moderate behaviour; the case, I say,  
of *violent persecution* must be particularly  
excepted; which may, in a great measure,  
destroy the natural advantages resulting  
from the practice of virtue. However it  
can't be denied, that a very considerable  
pleasure will arise from acting a *brave* and  
*steady* part, and adhering inflexibly to our  
duty under the bitterest reproaches and  
sufferings; and the inward shame and un-  
easiness, which a man of a generous temper  
must feel, on a cowardly deserting the cause  
of truth and righteousness, may *equal*, and  
sometimes, perhaps, *exceed* the inconveni-  
ences that the good man labours under,  
and bears with a patient, firm, unshaken  
mind, in maintenance of his integrity.

Finally, we are to understand the words  
of the text, not as speaking of what is al-  
ways *fact*, but of the direct and natural  
*tendency* of the thing. The pleasures of re-  
ligion may be destroy'd by *dark* and  
*gloomy* notions of it, or by the influence  
of



326 *Of the pleasures of a religious life.*

SERM. of a *melancholy* habit: But when there

XIII. is nothing in mens particular complection,  inclining to *spleen* and *dejectedness*, nothing in their scheme of religion, that leads to superstitious *rigour* and *severity*, when its duties are rightly understood, and carefully practis'd, the genuine effect of it is inward composure and satisfaction: *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* And, indeed, how can it be otherwise, when religion allows of all the innocent and desirable pleasures even of the *sensitive* kind, and by promoting the health of our bodies, and the chearfulness and serenity of our minds, *heightens* every other enjoyment; when 'tis nothing else but acting up to the *reason* and *truth* of things, an imitation of the moral perfections of God, and, consequently, the *rectitude*, and *supreme dignity* of human nature; and will therefore procure for us the acceptance and favour of our great creator, and a glorious and eternal reward. These necessary rules for understanding the text being premis'd, I proceed to show,

2dly, The *peculiar excellency* of the pleasures of religion and virtue; that they

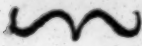
are

*Of the pleasures of a religious life.* 327

are the highest mankind are capable of; SERM.  
have every thing in them that can recom- XIII.  
mend any pleasures to the pursuit of rati-  
onal beings; and infinitely the advantage,  
in many respects, over all other enjoyments  
whatsoever. This I take to be the most  
necessary part of a discourse on this sub-  
ject; and the only consideration that is  
likely to reclaim those, whose judgments  
are perverted and darkned by a long indul-  
gence of irregular affections. Even such  
persons, who are unhappily enslaved to  
vice, will, I suppose, make no scruple of  
allowing, that there *may be* pleasures in a  
religious life, and the strict practice of vir-  
tue, where there is a *proper disposition* of  
mind to relish them; nay, moreover, that  
where this is the *particular turn*, they  
may afford a much more agreeable enter-  
tainment than any other pursuits of a dif-  
ferent kind. But then they will be apt  
to plead, that mens pleasures are as vari-  
ous as their *inclinations* and *tempers*, and  
the *prevailing principles* by which they  
are influenced; and, of consequence, as  
they find in themselves a *contrary taste*,  
whether it be from nature, or custom, the  
happiness

328 *Of the pleasures of a religious life.*

SERM. happiness that is most *suitable* for them

XIII. must lie quite another way; that they  
 have no notion of any greater or more  
 desirable pleasures, than what they al-  
*ready* enjoy; and that it is unreasonable  
 to expect they should give up those delights  
 which they have always been *used* to, and  
 know the *sweetness* and *value* of, for o-  
 thers which they never *experieñc'd*, and  
 perhaps shall never bring themselves tho-  
 roughly to *approve*; nay, which, for ought  
 they know, may have no real foundation  
 in *nature*, but spring entirely from a *par-*  
*ticular warmth* of *enthusiasm*, that only  
 a few are capable of.

What method now must we take to  
 convince such men of the weakness and  
 sophistry of their reasonings, and that  
 they miserably deceive and impose upon  
 themselves? — Will it be sufficient to  
 tell them barely, that there are pleasures  
 in the practice of *religion* and *virtue*? —  
 To this they will answer, that there are  
 pleasures, likewise, in the pursuits of *am-*  
*bition*, and *sensuality*. — The only way  
 therefore that we can follow is to shew,  
 that there is, in nature, a *difference* be-  
 tween



*Of the pleasures of a religious life.* 329

tween the several pleasures, to which man-S E R M.  
kind are addicted; that their particular X III.  
sentiments, prejudices, affections, and ha-  
bits don't *destroy*, or in reality at all *lessen*, this *necessary difference*; and that  
the *superiority* on all accounts, whether it  
be in respect of *purity, solidity, duration*,  
and every other circumstance that can  
help to furnish out the most *complete* sa-  
tisfaction, is on the side of the pleasures  
of the virtuous man. And this I shall  
attempt to do in the remaining part of  
my discourse; and hope, that tho' I must  
be oblig'd, by reducing this noble subject,  
which can hardly be exhausted, within so  
narrow a compass, to treat of it *partially*  
and *imperfectly*, sufficient hints may how-  
ever be suggested, to recommend a reli-  
gious life not only to the *graver* and more  
*considerate* part of this audience, but even  
to those, if there are any such, who are  
of a *gayer* turn, and have no esteem of any  
thing but as it contributes to their plea-  
sures.

I might begin with this, that the plea-  
sures of religion are *manly*, i. e. they are  
the exercise of our *noblest* faculties, and  
alone

330 *Of the pleasures of a religious life.*

SERM. alone suited to the *distinguishing* capaci-

XIII. ties of human nature. Indeed it must

be own'd, that sensitive gratifications are agreeable to *one part* of our frame, in which there are strong appetites, planted by the all-wise creator himself, that demand such gratifications; and consequently, they may, within certain bounds, be *innocently* and *regularly* indulg'd. But are these the *peculiar* pleasures for which mankind were form'd, and indu'd with those excellent powers that advance them so eminently above the animal creation? No one can bring himself to assert, or even to imagine this, who has ever consider'd his own make and constitution. *Reason* and *reflection* are of very little use to us in sensual enjoyments; which are found perhaps in much greater strength and perfection, among the brutes, who have nothing of this *sublime, over-ruling directing* principle, but are led only by *instinct* and *appetite*. Nay, it is not a mere *possible* supposition, but highly *probable*, since these are the only enjoyments they are capable of; and, besides, this further reason may be given, from the wisdom

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*Of the pleasures of a religious life.*

331

wisdom and goodness of God, why man-kind should not have so *exquisite* a taste of pleasures that depend on the bodily senses as inferior creatures, *viz.* lest their affections, which in the present state are apt to be most *impetuous* and *extravagant* this way, should be quite engaged and captivated by *lower* and *meaner* gratifications, to the neglect of much more *considerable*, even *intellectual* and *moral* pleasures. It appears then, that the indulgencies of sense are not the *peculiar* pleasures of a man, and have nothing at all to do with his *noblest*, his *distinguishing* faculties: They are not indeed, *unworthy* human nature in its state of *minority*; but may as properly be call'd *brutal*, as *manly* pleasures. On the contrary, the pleasures of which we are capable by means of our rational nature, are of an absolutely different kind: They are the pleasures of *piety*, *justice*, *gratitude*, *benevolence*, and a regular *self-government*: These therefore most *naturally* and *strictly* belong to us as men, and, of consequence, must be our *supreme* entertainment and delight. But perhaps

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XIII.  
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SERM. it will have little influence, against strong  
 XIII. prejudice and habit on the side of vice,  
 to shew that the pleasures of religion  
 are *manly*, and argue their *superior* ex-  
 cellency from thence; I shall therefore en-  
 deavour to prove, that they are, *in their*  
*own nature*, preferable to all other enjoy-  
 ments. And,

1<sup>st</sup>. The pleasures of virtue suppose  
 all those *unruly passions* to be subdu'd, or,  
 at least, controul'd and moderated, which  
 are the cause of the greatest disorders and  
 miseries in human life; all the *sensual*  
*passions* to be corrected, and kept within  
 their just limits, that they may neither  
 impair our health, corrupt and debase  
 our minds, or injure our fellow crea-  
 tures; all the disorderly motions of *pride*  
 and *envy* suppress'd; and the violent trans-  
 ports of *anger* and *revenge* check'd and  
 restrained; in short, every thing *calm* and  
*serene*, every affection and appetite obedi-  
 ent to the *still dictates* of reason, and,  
 consequently, creating neither disturbance  
*within*, nor confusion *without*. The right  
 government of the passions is an impor-  
 tant and essential branch of virtue, and  
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*Of the pleasures of a religious life.* 333

one of the chief pleasures that attend SERM.  
the practice of it: For besides the num- **XIII.**  
berless vexations and inquietudes which  
it prevents, it is a sedate, uniform, *self-*  
*enjoyment*, that no affluence of *outward*  
*prosperity*, no splendor of *greatness*, no  
*starts* and *flashes* of pleasure, no *short*  
*liv'd extasies* can compensate for the  
want of: Thus *compos'd* are the pleasures  
of religion. But can the same be said of  
any other pleasures? Far from it. To  
instance only in *sensual* indulgences; while  
a man is the most eager in the pur-  
suit of them, he may pine away with  
envy, be toss'd and agitated by furious  
resentments, or rack'd with the torments  
of disappointed ambition: Nay, they won't  
so much as remove the uneasiness, arising  
from the particular appetites to which  
they are immediately adapted; but as,  
before enjoyment, they are *restless* and  
*violent*, by frequent gratification they be-  
come more *inflamed* and *insatiable*.

2dly. It is another excellent property  
of the pleasures of religion and virtue, that  
they will bear the *strictest review*, and  
improve upon *reflection*. Let a man exa-

SERM. mine, ever so carefully, the pleasures he  
 XIII. feels on having faithfully discharg'd his  
 ~~~~~ duty to God, and practis'd that reverence and submission, that love and gratitude, which are immutably due, from all rational beings, to the father of the universe, the eternal and inexhaustible fountain of good; the pleasures of impartial justice, and generous, diffusive benevolence; or those that spring from temperance and chastity, keeping all his passions under strict government, and denying himself every irregular gratification, however agreeable to his warmest and strongest inclinations: let him examine these pleasures (I say) ever so carefully, and they will all appear to be worthy his most excellent faculties, the *dignity* and *refinement* of his nature. He will find himself so constituted, that it is impossible for him to avoid being delighted with the review of such a regular, honourable, and amiable conduct; and there is nothing but a sense of his defects, and not having cultivated these virtues in a higher degree, that can give the least check to his inward satisfaction. — Every

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Of the pleasures of a religious life. 335

new reflection is a *repetition* of the plea-
sure. SERM.
XIII.

But the enjoyments of sense, if pursu'd with the utmost prudence and moderation, will be found to be, at best, but *innocent*. There is nothing in them that shews the *excellency* of our constitution, above that of the creatures below us; and, consequently, it is not in their nature to yield that generous and sublime delight, that arises from exercises of piety and virtue. Nay there is, really, something *mortifying* that attends a just estimate and consideration of them; as they discover to us the *weakness* and *imperfection* of our present frame, and the *disorders* to which it is liable. For by means of that very *animal* composition, which renders us capable of enjoyments of this kind, we are subject to innumerable inconveniencies; not only to ungovern'd passions, and the fatal extravagancies that they continually produce, but to dejected spirits, confus'd and melancholy thoughts, sickness, pain, and all the evils of mortality. And if the indulgences of sense, even when they are most regular,

336 *Of the pleasures of a religious life.*

SERM. yield so little comfort on a review, and
 XIII. are rather a *humbling* consideration, than
 a source of real satisfaction to the mind;
 in what a disagreeable light must the
excesses of luxury and *vitious* pleasure ap-
 pear, upon cool and impartial reflection?
 These, the natural consequences of which,
 where there is not a hardened insensible
 temper, are nothing but *confusion*, *shame*
 and *remorse*, can't bear a comparison with
 the rational pleasures of religion, which,
 the more they are *considered*, must be the
 more thoroughly *approved*. Religious
 pleasures are, of all others, the most *pure*
 and *unmixt*, not interrupted in the en-
 joyment with disquieting suspicions, nor
 succeeded by uneasy terrors: And this
 is one of their noblest and most recom-
 mending properties; a property that can
 never belong to any enjoyments, how-
 ever, for the *moment* they last, *transport-*
ing, however *applauded* and *admired*, that
 reason condemns. And nothing can more
 fully demonstrate the folly of such irregu-
 lar indulgences than this, that it is abso-
 lutely impossible for any man to be hap-
 py, whose favourite gratifications leave a

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Of the pleasures of a religious life. 337

sting behind them, who is *ashamed* of SERM.
his conduct, and at *variance* with himself. **XIII.**

3dly. The pleasures of religion depend
entirely on *ourselves*, and not on those
numberless accidents, which may either
prevent, or blast, or entirely destroy all
outward pleasures: — Not on the *senses*
which may lose their quickness; — not
on the *animal passions*, which may grow
faint and languid; — not on the return
of an *over-loaded* and *jaded* appetite; —
not on mutual *agreement* and *confedera-*
cy; — not on *critical* seasons, and *spe-*
cial opportunities; — nor on the *jea-*
lousies, *passions*, and *opposite interests* of our
fellow creatures. These things have al-
most the sole influence in forming, and
disposing of the pleasures of the *ambi-*
tious and the *sensualist*; but those that
spring from virtue are *free* and *inde-*
pendent: Being seated in the mind, they
may be enjoy'd in their greatest refine-
ment when the body decays, and the edge
of all its appetites is blunted. The ma-
lice and power of the most formidable
oppressors, who may take from us all the
outward accommodations of life, can't

SERM. deprive us of them — They forsake us

XIII. not even in *solitude*. — But if we were

banished the society of all mankind, a consciousness of our integrity, while we convers'd in the world, and the reflection on the simplicity and rectitude of our manners, would furnish out a *great* and *noble* entertainment. And as the pleasures of a good life depend entirely on *ourselves*, it is in our power to be always *increasing* them by a greater proficiency in virtue; whereas those of sense are according to *fix'd* and *stated* laws of nature, by us unalterable. We may, indeed, animate and raise our *imagination*s, and promise ourselves, *beforehand*, extraordinary scenes of delight; but with all our art can do but little, if any thing at all, to heighten the actual enjoyment.

Again, another very considerable recommendation of the pleasures of religion is, that they can never be pursu'd to an *excess*: — Never beyond the most deliberate dictates of reason; — never to bring a just reproach upon ourselves; — or to the injury of others. On the contrary, the more we are employ'd in these

these pleasures, and, consequently, in cultivating the solid principles of virtue, on which they are founded, the more shall we *enoble* and *exalt* our nature, and be more *extensively* useful to mankind. But the *excesses* of other kinds of pleasure are daily *notorious*, and fill the world with the utmost confusion and misery. They impair *health*, consume the *substance*, bring infamy upon the *character*, introduce most deplorable distress into *families*, and violate the general peace and order of *human society*. Instead of *inlarging* the mind, and inspiring sentiments of generosity, their natural effect is to *enervate* and *soften* it, and render it unfit for all that is great and manly. In short, they are, in this particular, quite the *reverse* of the pleasures of religion, that in every instance the greatest difficulty is, to prevent their being carried to an *excess*; For without great prudence, care, and resolution, they will infallibly be attended with most pernicious consequences, and hurry us on to very fatal extremes.

5thly. Religious pleasures are our *best*, our *only* support, under the disappointments

340 *Of the pleasures of a religious life.*

SERM.ments and calamities of life. There are
 XIII. *lesser* cares, which a person may possibly
 ~ divert, at least in some degree, by a
 course of intemperance and luxury; by
 constantly inflaming his passions, and do-
 ing his utmost to keep reason asleep:
 But this is not so much the *patience* and
firmness of a *man*, as the *stupidity* of a
brute. And after all, as insensible as the
 sinner may appear to be in the midst of
 his affected gaiety, his mind may be *con-*
fus'd, and an utter stranger to a *settled*
 cheerfulness and peace: Or, however,
 there are some circumstances, in which
 all outward comforts must fail him, and
 leave him quite destitute of relief. Let
 us suppose, for instance, that he labours
 under decays of nature, or is tormented
 with acute pains, or under the *immediate*
apprehensions of death; in such a condi-
 tion as this, when he is altogether inca-
 pable of any of those sensual gratifica-
 tions, which he has always pursued as
 the sum of his felicity, will the remem-
 brance of *past* pleasures refresh and bear
 up his spirits? Quite the contrary. They
 must appear, at best, to be *insignificant*,
 and

Of the pleasures of a religious life. 341

and *trifling*; and it is natural to expect, SERM.
that a review of the guilty scene will XIII.
alarm, and fill him with *horror*, and ren-
der his other miseries more heavy and
insupportable.

But the good man, who has acted as
became him, and steadily adher'd to the
rules of virtue and religion, has in all
such *critical seasons* of distress, a solid and
substantial support. The integrity of his
heart will keep him from *sinking*. The
perfect resignation of his mind to provi-
dence will prevent his being *ruffled* and
discompos'd. Nay, his pleasures will not
desert him in the very *last extremity* of
nature; but a sense of his Maker's favour,
and the prospect of an happy immorta-
lity, must needs *alleviate* the weight of
every affliction he suffers, and enable
him to bear up, under the wastings of
a *shatter'd, tottering* constitution, with *re-*
solution and *constancy*. And, surely, no-
thing can be more desirable than to have
relief from *within*, when all is dark and
gloomy *without* us.

Finally, the pleasures of religion are
of all others the most *durable*. We car-
ry

SERM. IV. them always about with us, ready for
 XIII. use on every *emergency*. They are not
 enjoyed by starts, nor require, in order to
 their being relish'd, dull and tedious in-
 tervals of indolence, or *painful expecta-*
tion; but are a *constant* fund of delight.
 They never *sate*, never grow *flat* on
 frequent use; but rather more *strong,*
fresh, and *lively*.

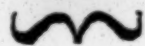
But do any of these excellent proper-
 ties belong to the pleasures of the *Epicure*?
 Are they not *superficial* and *momentary*?
 Do they not end in *loss* of *appetite*, and a
stupid listlessness at least, if not in confu-
 sion and remorse? Does not a too fre-
 quent repetition of them render them
heavy and *unentertaining*, and, sometimes,
 quite *nauseous*, till the spirits are recruited
 and the senses recover their former quick-
 ness? Will they not forsake us at death,
 and leave us intirely destitute of com-
 fort in the eternal world? What then
 can be more wild and extravagant, than
 for a man to purchase them by de-
 bauching his *reason*, and forfeiting his
honour, with the loss of his *innocence* and
peace; and the pleasures of religion that
 will

Of the pleasures of a religious life.

343

will continue *for ever*, and be only re-
viv'd, enlarg'd, and perfected, in the fu-
ture state?

SERM.
XIII.



—Consider this, be wise, *and shew yourselves men*.—Give up the *base* and *unworthy* gratifications of vice and sensuality, for the *refin'd* and *god-like* entertainments of virtue; for the *calmness* and *evenness* of an upright mind; and the *exalted* pleasure of doing good.

—Exchange the satisfactions of a *brute* for the joys of *angels*.—Be ambitious to partake of the happiness of *God himself*.—This *reason*, and every principle of *generosity* strongly dictate: Nay, consult even your *self-love*, and that will direct to it. But if for the sake of irregular enjoyments, which are *short-liv'd, uncertain, and superficial*, you sacrifice the *noblest* and *purest* pleasures that human nature is capable of; your *folly* and *wickedness* must be both *inexcusable*.

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S E R M O N XIV.

Religion founded on reason, and
the right of private judgment.

JOSH. XXIV. 15.

*And if it seem evil unto you to serve
the LORD, choose ye this day
whom ye will serve, whether
the Gods which your fathers
served that were on the other
side of the flood, or the Gods of
the Amorites, in whose land ye
dwell: But as for me, and my
house, we will serve the LORD.*



IN the former part of this chap-S E R M.
ter, *Josbua*, having assembled XIV.
the tribes of *Israel* together
at *Shechem*, gives them a brief
history of the astonishing acts of God in
their

SERM. their favour, from his first appearance
 XIV. to *Abraham* to their settlement in the
 promised land. He recounts the call
 of *Abraham* from idolaters, to the ac-
 knowledgment and worship of the one
 true God, with a view to preserve, a-
 mongst his posterity, the grand princi-
 ples of religion pure and uncorrupted;
 the unsettled condition of their great pro-
 genitor in the land of *Canaan*; the op-
 pression of their ancestors in *Egypt*, and
 miraculous deliverance from thence by
 the hands of *Moses* and *Aaron*, who were
 enabled to prove their commission by
 such awful credentials, as not only hum-
 bled the pride of the *Egyptian* king, and
 struck terror into all his people, but were
 the fullest evidence of the supreme uni-
 versal dominion, and irresistible power of
 the God of *Israel*; and finally his won-
 derful conduct and support of them in
 the wilderness, his destroying the ido-
 latrous nations that set themselves to op-
 pose their passage, and fixing them, at
 length, in the possession of that good land,
 which he had promis'd to give them for
 an inheritance. And from this series of

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and the right of private judgment. 347

surprizing providences, *Joshua* argues, in SERM.
the 14th verse, the obligations they were XIV.
under to *fear the LORD*, to *serve him in*
sincerity and truth, and renounce all the
idolatry of their *fathers*. But because it
was necessary that their religion should be
free and voluntary, he refers the matter
entirely to their own determination, up-
on a review of the reasons which he had
offered, only declaring for himself and
his family, that they would adhere to the
acknowledgment and worship of the true
God, whatever choice the rest of the
people might make: *And if it seem evil*
unto you to serve the LORD, choose ye this
day, whom ye will serve, whether the Gods
whom your fathers served that were on the
other side of the flood, or the Gods of the
Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as
for me, and my house, we will serve the
LORD.

'Tis remarkable, that in this passage
Joshua takes it for granted, that if the
Israelites revolted from the true God, they
would fix in some form of religion or
other; and not turn absolute *atheists*, and
cast off all religion. And, indeed, the

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SERM. character of an Atheist would hardly be
 XIV. thought possible to happen amongst man-
 kind, who are reasonable creatures, did it not appear in fact, that some have so darkned and defaced the reason of their minds, as to dispute *first* principles, to question even the existence of a Deity, and banter the obligations of religion and virtue. From whence we learn, that as human nature is capable of a vast enlargement of its faculties, and of attaining to high degrees of moral perfection and excellence, it may also be sunk into the lowest state of corruption and degeneracy. For the evidences of a supreme and sovereign intelligence, the creator and governour, of the world, appear plainly every where. Earth, sea, and air bear the strongest testimony to this fundamental truth: *The heavens likewise declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work.* By the existence of *effects*, we are necessarily led to the acknowledgment of an eternal *first cause*; and the giving being to such an infinite variety of creatures, the supporting and animating universal nature, the

the admirable order, and exquisite uses of S E R M.
the several parts of it, the preserving XIV.
such an immense frame of things in con-
stant and perfect harmony, making even
the minutest parts subserve the beauty
of the whole natural system, and the
general good of the moral world; these,
I say, are the clearest demonstrations of
the *infinite wisdom* and *power* of the Deity.
And from his infinite wisdom, which
must inform him at all times what is fit-
test to be done, and his infinite power en-
abling him with ease to effect it, and con-
sequently his consummate and immutable
happiness, we may certainly infer his
moral perfection; nay, that he is a being
of *absolute* and *necessary* moral perfection;
who can have no temptation to violate
any of the eternal rules of righteousness,
truth, and goodness, but will always pur-
sue what is best upon the whole. And
the duties, which *more immediately* relate
to this supreme mind, naturally arise
from the notion of his absolute perfec-
tion, and universal preserving and govern-
ing providence; as do these of *justice* and
charity from the circumstances, and ne-
cessities

SERM. necessities of mankind, and the relations
 XIV. in which they mutually stand to each
 other; and the obligation to *temperance*
 and *self-government*, from its necessary
 subserviency to the above-mentioned great
 and indispensable duties, and to the rec-
 titude of our rational nature.

What can we think of the man then,
 who denies and reviles these plainest dic-
 tates of reason? — Who believes that
 a world, the parts of which are in a con-
 tinual *flux*, and undergo innumerable
changes, is a *self-existent* and *necessary* sys-
 tem; — Or that a world, which has
 in its frame and structure characters of
 the highest *wisdom*, and most curious
design, was formed by *chance*; ——— or
 that it can preserve itself, and is inde-
 pendent on him that made it; ——— that
 mankind, who are *reasonable* and *free* be-
 ings, and consequently *moral* and *account-*
table agents, are bound by no *law*, and
 have no inspector and judge of their con-
 duct; — that he who endued them with
 moral powers will take no cognizance
 whether they are *improved*, or *neglected*
 and *abused*; — and that virtue and vice
 are

and the right of private judgment. 351

are mere *empty names*; — What, I say, SERM.
XIV. can we think of the man who maintains such gross absurdities, in opposition to the plain nature of things, and the almost unanimous sense of his fellow-creatures, but that he is an *irregularity*, a sort of *monster* in the human species, (whose distinguishing excellency it is that they are rational) and as such not fit even to be *supposed* to exist, till apparent and undeniable fact declares it? I proceed now to propose some other useful observations from the text, as the subject of my following discourse. And,

I. I observe that religion is a *voluntary* thing, and a matter of *choice*. Accordingly we find, that *Joshua* left it to the *Israelites*, if it seem'd *evil* to them to *serve the LORD*, to *choose*, for themselves, *whom* they would *serve*; in which he acted as one who had a just knowledge of human nature. For mankind are beings endued with *reason* and *liberty*; and *this alone* makes them capable of religion and virtue. Without these powers they would be upon a level with brute creatures, and 'tis the *right* or *wrong* ex-

SERM. exercise of them that constitutes the *moral*
 XIV. *good*, or *evil* of actions; as will appear
 from the following considerations.

A man may have a good *natural disposition* to justice, beneficence, a sober and orderly behaviour, to meekness, peaceableness, and the like; but tho' these are important branches of a religious conduct, the *natural disposition itself* is not religion, but the *prefering* it to the *contrary* temper, and *cultivating* and *improving* it by those helps and motives which religion affords for that purpose; any more than a *natural tendency* to peevishness and sudden passion is vicious and sinful. The one is a misfortune like a *bodily defect*, or a *sickly constitution*, but can't be deem'd a proper fault, because 'tis *unavoidable* and *necessary*; and for the same reason the other, which, so far as it springs entirely from nature, is equally necessary, cannot be virtuous, or, in a *strict* sense, rewardable.

Again, what just foundation for praise is there in a man's being of the *true* religion, a *Christian* suppose, by *chance*? without knowing the grounds of his religion,

gion, or the reason of his hope? merely SERM.
because his *ancestors* were Christians, and XIV.
Christianity is the *establisb'd* religion? *i. e.*
upon the same foot as he might have
been of a *false* religion, a *Mahometan*,
or an *Idolater*. Such a man's faith, tho'
by a *fortunate accident* of the most ex-
cellent kind, is no more a virtue than a
good *natural completion*, or the happy
situation and temperature of the country
where he was born. Indeed the truths,
which he was thus *born* to the know-
ledge of, may be of great use to him, as
they may be the foundation of a more
perfect morality than they can be ex-
pected to arrive at, who are destitute of
such advantages, whose lot is cast in the
more dark and uncultivated parts of the
world; but the *faith*, from whence these
better morals proceed, has, considered in
itself, no more real merit in it than the
ignorance of an uninstructed infidel.
Whereas not only the *morality*, but the
faith of one, who is of the true religion
from conviction and choice, is virtuous
and commendable, because it is acquired
by the exercise and improvement of his

SERM. rational faculties; and on the contrary
 XIV. the *errors* which such a person may fall
 into, after proper care to avoid them,
 and sincere endeavours, in the use of all
 the necessary means, to come to the
 knowledge of the truth, will not be of
 any great *consequence* in themselves, nor
dangerous to his happiness. So that, in
 many cases, 'tis better to *err* with an
 honest, unbiass'd, inquisitive mind (for
 this is oftentimes the natural effect of
 human infirmity, where there is the *best*
 temper, and a true *rectitude* of the will
 and affections) than to be in the *right*
 from custom, and an implicit reverence
 for tradition and authority; especially, if
 with a sound and orthodox faith, there
 be join'd a narrow disposition, neglect of
 free and rational enquiry, pride, preju-
 dice, and censoriousness, which are the
 direct and immediate sources of *error*,
 but can be of no possible service to the
 cause of *truth*.

But farther, that our religion is only
 so far praise-worthy, as it is the matter
 of our *choice*, is evident from hence;
 that a man may perform an action that

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is in itself *good*, for example, an act of *beneficence*, and yet if he does not choose to do it as a *kind, beneficent* action, but from some other motives in which *religion* and *virtue* are not concern'd, it will not be a *virtuous* action; nay, it may be done from such principles, and to answer such purposes, as are evil and sinful, and then, taken *in all its circumstances*, it will be a *wicked* action; and the more so, because it is abusing an action that is good in itself to serve so vile an end. On the contrary, if a sincerely religious man does an action which is in itself *evil* with a good design, and especially, if through *mistake* he thinks it his duty, the honest intention may be perhaps in some degree his excuse; but how far it may be pleaded must be left to the decision of the supreme and righteous judge of the world, who alone knows what *negligence* or criminal *prejudice* was the occasion of the erroneous judgment of his mind, and consequently, how far his present ill conduct, tho' pursu'd with *upright* views, is owing to a preceding *wrong choice*. And,

Since

SERM.

XIV.

Since it so plainly appears that religion, as it is the means of procuring for us acceptance with God, must be a *voluntary* thing, it necessarily follows that every man has an undoubted right to *judge for himself*, what form or method of religion is most rational, and agreeable to the divine will. For how can his religion be the result of his *free choice*, if he be not allow'd to *choose* for himself *at all*, in matters of religion; nay if it be not left absolutely to his own determination? *Restrain* this liberty, and you *destroy* it. There is no doing the matter by *halves*; but a man must either judge *entirely* for himself, or *another* must judge entirely for him: There is no *medium*. The former of these is the true state of the case, as has been already shewn; and it is evident farther from this consideration, that every man is, in his own frame and constitution, a *moral* agent, and an *accountable* being, and consequently must be left to think and act, as his own *private judgment* directs. His choice must be *uncontroul'd*; and no power upon earth has a right to compel him

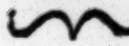
even

even to a profession of the *true* religion. SERM.

Whether the civil magistrate has a XIV.

right to punish *Atheists*, and such as deny the obligations of all religion, natural and reveal'd, as long as they behave like good subjects, and peaceable and useful members of society, may be justly questioned: This enquiry, however, is not to our present purpose, my business at this time being only to prove, that he ought to leave every man to the quiet profession of that religion, which his own judgment and conscience approve, and not to use *forcible* methods to bring any to the acknowledgment of the *establish'd* religion. And if what I am now arguing against be a part of the authority of the chief magistrate as *such*, it must belong to the supreme power of all nations *equally*; and consequently it must be the office of the magistrate to propagate, by force, *heathen idolatry* in heathen countries, the *Mahometan superstition* in Mahometan countries, as well as *Christianity* in Christian countries; *i. e.* since this power essentially belongs to his office, it must be his duty to establish by violence both the *true*,

SERM. *true*, and *false* religions; or, in other

XIV. words, to do things which are *contra-*
 *dictory*, and *repugnant* to each other.

To say that he has only authority to compel men to embrace the *true* religion, will make no real difference in the case; for if we will not entirely destroy his *coercive jurisdiction*, that can be nothing else than what the civil magistrate, in every particular country, *thinks* to be *true*. And where there are several powers, all *equal* and *independent*, who claim to be the patrons and defenders of the *true* religion, which, in fact, deserves that character, can only be determin'd either by a serious free and impartial examination of the *pretensions* of *each* (a thing not to be expected in the present case, since it is this very liberty that is suppos'd to be *restrain'd*) or by an *immediate revelation* from heaven.

Again, the use of force can be of no service to true religion, because it cannot convince the judgment, nor consequently make *real converts* to it; but has a tendency to encrease *fraud* and *hypocrisy*, which is utterly inconsistent with
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religion. Such a method is likewise high-SERM.
ly dishonourable to *truth*, as it puts it XIV.
upon the same foot with *falsehood* and *im-*
posture. And,

Finally, the office of the magistrate is to defend the properties and civil immunities of the subject, and to secure and promote the public good; and therefore he must be bound to restrain and punish those vices, which are a violation of mens natural rights, destructive of the order and happiness of society, and tending to public confusion and ruin. But what business can he have to meddle *beyond* this? Or to inquire into the speculative *opinions* of those who behave in an honest inoffensive manner, and contribute their part to the general good? Into opinions that are not *detrimental* to the *peace* of the community? For 'tis the *ungovern'd passion*, the *bitterness* and *contention* which attend religious controversies, that do all the mischief, and not *mere difference* of opinion. And I am persuaded, had the civil power interested itself less in mens *religious* enquiries and disputes, the world would have

SERM. have been much more *peaceable* than it
 XIV. has been; and we should not have had
 so many *unintelligible, absurd* and *extravagant* doctrines claiming to be parts of true religion, nor consequently so much *infidelity*; nor, I believe, so great a variety of sentiments as have abounded, especially in the Christian world. For a rational and free enquiry is much more likely to produce *uniformity* of opinion amongst sober and considerate men, than imposition and violence. So that upon these accounts it appears, that religion, which is a *personal* thing, and entirely a *voluntary* obligation, ought to be left *free* to every man's reason; and that the civil magistrate, instead of *restraining* the liberty of private judgment, is bound to *protect* all his subjects in it, as much as in any other of their *natural rights*, against all encroachments whatsoever.

Let me add, before I conclude this head, that as it follows, from religion's being a matter of *choice*, that every man has a right to judge for himself which is the *true* religion, and the most acceptable method of serving God; so likewise,
 that

and the right of private judgment. 361

that he ought to use all those means, SERM. XIV.
which the providence of God hath put in his power, in order to make a *right* choice. For *choice*, or giving the *preference*, supposes that that which is the object of it is the *best* of the kind; but how can men judge what religion is *best*, or consequently make a *rational* and *deliberate* choice of it, if they are not *impartial* and *diligent* in their enquiries? Of this I shall have occasion to say something more under the next observation; to which I now proceed.

2dly, We may infer from the text, that no man can be obliged to embrace a religion that is *evil*, i. e. contrary to reason, and the moral fitness of things; but, on the contrary, is bound to reject it. If, says *Joshua* to the *Israelites*, *it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose ye this day whom ye will serve*; by which he plainly intimated, that if the religion, which the God of *Israel* enjoin'd, had been really *evil*, i. e. unfit, and unreasonable; it would not only have been *lawful*, but their *duty*, to have look'd out for some better scheme. And indeed
the

SER M. the thing is so clear in itself, that I need
 XIV. not say much to illustrate and confirm it.
 I shall do it therefore, briefly, by an instance or two.

If any scheme of religion undermines the perfections of God, which the reason of our minds can demonstrate from certain principles, it cannot be *true*. For example, if it represents him as an *arbitrary* being, who acts without regard to the reason of things, not only in the distributions of his bounty, but in his government of moral agents; as an *unjust, tyrannical* being, who has clogg'd the happiness of mankind with insuperable difficulties, and made it depend either upon their *believing* or *doing* impossibilities; or as an *angry, revengeful* being, who delights in cruelty, and in the misery and destruction of his creatures. And the same may be said of any other descriptions of the Deity that derogate from his *absolute perfection*, which is the necessary foundation of all true religion. Again, that scheme of religion must necessarily be *false*, and ought to be rejected with *detestation*, which *dissolves* or *weakens* the obligations

and the right of private judgment. 363

obligations to universal purity; and tends to licentiousness and vice; which indulges to sensuality, censoriousness, revenge, and encourages violence, persecution, &c. because virtue is of eternal and unchangeable obligation, and the above-mention'd and all other vices are unsuitable to human nature, and the established order of things; and finally, such an evil scheme ought to be abhorr'd, because it is destructive of the moral rectitude and happiness of mankind, which it must be the design of all true religion to support and advance, and in which the perfections of the Deity are most gloriously display'd: And the allowing that it is mens duty to reject any pretended revelation, that contradicts the principles of natural religion and morality, can be no prejudice to the cause of *Christianity*; nor hinder its being acknowledg'd and reverenc'd by considerate and impartial minds: If it could, I own that this would be an *insuperable objection* against the Christian institution. But its doctrines are perfectly consistent and rational, and its precepts most wise, just, and good:

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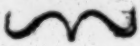
SER M.

XIV.

SERM It gives us the noblest ideas of God,
 XIV. recommends the most strict and universal
 virtue, and enforces the practice of it by
 the worthiest and strongest motives; and
 is excellently adapted to promote private
 perfection and happiness, and the order,
 peace, and well being of societies: It
 will therefore stand the test of the exact-
 est judgment, and bear the most *severe*
 and critical, provided it be likewise an
honest and *impartial* examination: Nay,
 the more thoroughly it is consider'd and
 enquir'd into by the light of uncorrupted
 reason, the more its morals are compar'd
 with the most perfect systems of *philoso-*
phy, or with the morals of other *real*, or
pretended revelations; the more will it
 shine and be distinguish'd for its excel-
 lence, as an institution of all others most
 perfective of true goodness, most worthy
 of God, and useful to mankind.

It can't be thought after this, that, by
 what has been said, I intend to insinuate
 that all religions are *equal*, and that 'tis
 indifferent whether a man chooses the
true religion or a *false* one: For our sen-
 timents of things, or giving the pre-
 ference

and the right of private judgment. 365

ference to one thing above another, will SERM.
not alter their *real nature*. Truth will XIV.
still be truth, and falshood falshood, 
whatever mens judgments and determi-
nations are. The true religion will be
worthy to be *receiv'd*, tho' it should hap-
pen to be *universally rejected*; and an
evil scheme of religion to be *rejected*,
tho' it should be *universally receiv'd*. And
tho' religion must be a *voluntary* thing,
and a matter of *choice*; it is however
our duty, in order to the making this
choice, to be *diligent* and *impartial* in our
enquiries. For the great author of our
nature hath endued it with such facul-
ties, as are *proper* to distinguish betwixt
truth and error, and appear to have been
given us for this very purpose. There is
also a fix'd and certain *standard* of truth
in the reason of things, which, in all ca-
ses of importance, and necessary influence
upon our happiness, is sufficiently clear
and explicit to *well-dispos'd* minds. If
therefore we indulge to a lazy indolence,
and suffer our *judgment*, and consequently
our *choice*, thro' prejudice and vitious af-
fections to be abused and perverted, we

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are

SERM. are justly liable to blame and punishment.

XIV. And again, tho' we may with safety reject a religion that is unreasonable, that patronizes vice, and is dishonourable to Almighty God; yet it must be allow'd, that in order to our being able to judge whether it deserves that character or no, we must *carefully* and *calmly* examine it: And, consequently, if for want of due enquiry, occasion'd by a prejudice in favour of our vices, by a regard to worldly interest, or by any other evil principle, we reject the true religion under the notion of falshood, our *believing* that we *may* and *ought* thus to reject it will not excuse us. For so far as our not knowing our duty is *voluntary*, and springs from the *non-improvement* of those capacities and advantages for better information, which God, in his providence, has conferr'd upon us; so far as it arises from the want of an *honest unprejudiced* mind, and of exercising that *care* and *diligence* in our enquiries, which may justly be expected from *rational* and *moral* agents; so far as our not seeing what it *becomes* us to see is not owing to a *weak* and *insufficient* light,

and the right of private judgment. 367

light, but to *listlessness* and *indifference*, SERM.
and the influence of *ungovern'd appetites*; XIV.
we are, in the sight of God chargeable
with *wickedness* and *insincerity*, and, con-
sequently, liable to the effects of his dis-
pleasure.

3dly, We should learn, from *Joshua's* ex-
ample, to be faithful to the cause of God,
and the interest of religion and virtue,
even in times of most *general* corruption
and depravity. He bravely resolv'd to
adhere to the worship of the true God,
tho' the whole body of the *Israelites* should
revolt to idolatry; *as for me and my house,*
we will serve the LORD. And the same
ought to be the conduct of every reason-
able man, *viz. inflexibly* to pursue what
he is convinc'd to be his duty, whatever
the practice of *others* may be, and what-
ever they may *think*, or *say* of him. Sin-
gularity, in things indifferent, may gene-
rally perhaps be an argument of *weakness*
and *folly*, or of unbecoming *stiffness* and
obstinacy; but men have carried the argu-
ment much too far, when they have paid
so great a compliment to *custom*, as to urge
it against the practice of *virtue itself*. For

SER M. the obligations of virtue are upon no considerations whatsoever to be dispens'd
 XIV. with, much less for a piece of *foolish fawning complaisance*; and a man of reason would never consent to do a thing that was *really* dishonourable, for the sake of avoiding *undeserv'd* reproach.

Indeed if virtue and vice were merely *arbitrary*, and had no difference in the nature of things, 'twould be unreasonable to be *singular* in what is now call'd virtue, when what is call'd vice came in *fashion*, and had the *character* and *reputation* of virtue: Nay farther, one would comply in things *lawful*, with the general prevailing humour of mankind, rather than look *odd* and *particular*, tho it was somewhat contrary to one's own inclination. But what man in his senses would consent to corrupt and dishonour his nature, and make himself miserable, only because others did the like? Is a mortal distemper the less cautiously avoided because 'tis *epidemical*? Are not the obligations we are under to the great author of our being, to the law of our reasonable nature, and to preserve our integrity,
 of

and the right of private judgment. 369

of the *first* importance? Does not the *rectitude* and *happiness* of the moral world necessarily depend upon fulfilling those obligations? And is it not then our wisdom to be inflexible in this cause, tho' all men should *desert* and *reproach* us? Or shall we sacrifice this, which is the highest interest of human nature, to the passions, prejudices, and wickedness of an *unthinking, deluded, and degenerate* world?

Again, to dare to be *singularly good* is an argument of great resolution and strength of mind, and of a confirm'd and establish'd virtue: For such must that virtue be, which repels the contagion of *ill examples*, and flags not at *reproaches* and *ill treatment*. And I doubt not but such a character appears *brave* and *heroic* in the history of *Joshua*, or of any other persons in *former* ages, even to those, who, in very corrupt times, are induc'd by the force of custom, or to justify their own practice, to censure and exclaim against it as precise and enthusiastical; which shews, that their objection is not so much against the *thing itself*, as against the *odium* and *scandal* that may attend it.

A a 4

But

SERM. But surely we may be sufficiently forti-

XIV. fied in this respect, by considering, that
 ~~~~~ while we thus conduct ourselves, we act  
 suitably to the dignity of our reasonable  
 frame, and conform to the example of  
 the supreme being, whose goodness is  
*constant and invariable*; and that such a  
*steady integrity* will render us approv'd of  
 by this most excellent being, and be re-  
 compens'd, hereafter, with everlasting ho-  
 nour and happiness.

I shall conclude all with observing,  
 that the design of *Josbua*, to use his  
 utmost credit and influence with his  
 more *immediate dependants*, for the sup-  
 port and maintenance of *religion*, was  
 truly *noble and generous*; and what it will  
 be highly for the *honour* of every one of  
 us to imitate. For it won't bear a serious  
 dispute, which is the most *amiable* cha-  
 racter, which the most *useful* member of  
 society, which the *best* parent, and head  
 of a family; he that endeavours to in-  
 struct those under his care in *just* and *wor-*  
*thy* notions of God, and leads 'em on to  
 virtue by an *exemplary* behaviour; or  
 another, with the same natural accom-  
 plishments,



*and the right of private judgment.* 371

plishments, or acquir'd excellencies, and SERM.  
of the same rank and situation in the XIV.  
world, who leaves his children and ser-  
vants to the *full swing* of their licentious  
appetites, is not at all concern'd about  
cultivating and improving in their minds  
sentiments of *piety*, and a regard to *good*  
*morals*, or, which is much worse, first *de-*  
*bauches*, and then *hardens* them in wic-  
kedness, by his own *irregular* life.



S E R M O N



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## SERMON XV.

The evidence of a future state, on the principles of reason and revelation, distinctly considered.

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2 TIM. i. 10.

— *Who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*



It is observable in almost <sup>SERM.</sup> all controversies, whether of <sup>XV.</sup> greater or lesser importance, that both sides are apt to run into extremes, in the heat of their opposition to each other. Men are seldom inclin'd



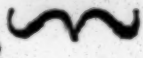
SERM. clin'd to consider the principles of their  
 XV. adversaries as of a *mixt* nature, partly  
 right and partly wrong (which yet is  
 very often the case) but seem rather to  
 think, that they ought to keep at the  
 greatest *distance* from them that is pos-  
 sible, and that all *concessions* are dishonour-  
 able, and a betraying the cause of truth.  
 I might illustrate this by a variety of in-  
 stances, but it will be more to my pre-  
 sent purpose to confine myself to one of  
 the most considerable, and that is, the  
 grand dispute about the powers of *rea-  
 son*, and the advantages and uses of *reve-  
 lation*.

On the one hand reason is magnify'd as  
 a plain, distinct, and sufficient rule in *all*  
 circumstances; and a particular exter-  
 nal revelation, to fix and explain the  
 principles and obligations of morality, is  
 represented as absolutely *needless*, and,  
 consequently, unbecoming the infinite  
 wisdom of God, who can do nothing *in  
 vain*. On the other, revelation is not  
 only describ'd as expedient and useful in  
*certain* circumstances, but strictly *neces-  
 sary*; and reason as a blind erroneous  
 guide,

guide, that is incapable *in itself* to direct SERM.  
mankind to the true knowledge of God, XV.  
or give them just notions of their duty  
and happiness. Again, the advocates for  
the *strength* and *perfection* of natural rea-  
son are apt to talk of it, not only as af-  
fording clear and strong evidence of a  
future state of rewards and punishments  
*in general*, but even of a state of *immor-*  
*tal*ity; and that, therefore, we have very  
little, if any, advantage from *revelation*,  
with respect to this great and important  
article, beyond what we may receive from  
that *original light*, which is implanted in  
every man's mind. On the contrary, some  
defenders of revelation imagine, that no-  
thing of this can be allow'd without di-  
minishing its authority and excellence;  
and that reason is not only dark and con-  
fus'd with respect to the soul's *immortality*,  
but gives no probability of *any future*  
*state*. Both these, in my judgment, car-  
ry the matter *beyond* the truth; and  
would, perhaps, have fix'd in some *mid-*  
*dle* opinion, if their thoughts had been  
intirely *disinterested*, and they had not had  
in view the maintaining and supporting

SERM. a particular scheme. For let reason be,

XV. *in itself*, and if *rightly exercis'd*, ever so  
 ~~~~~ sufficient to instruct mankind in religion  
 and good morals, a revelation will be
 nevertheless desirable and beneficial, when
 it is actually *corrupted* and *darkned*, and
 the world is over-run with ignorance and
 superstition. In like manner, it can be
 of no possible disservice to the cause of
 Christianity, to suppose that *reason* might
 have discover'd a future state, any more
 than to allow that it has reviv'd the
 knowledge of other *natural* truths, which
 tho' founded in reason, and capable of be-
 ing known by it, were, however, in a
 great measure *obliterated* and *lost*. Besides
 it is generally thought, in most other
 cases, to be one of the chief excellencies
 of revelation, that its most essential and
 important doctrines are agreeable to what
 the *light of reason itself* teaches. And
 shall the *same* thing be deem'd a dis-
 paragement to it in this particular in-
 stance? Let the belief of a future state
 be a dictate of *nature*, revelation will be
 still highly serviceable to mankind, by
 removing all *uncertainty* and *confusion* in
 their

their reasonings about it, and rectifying SERM.
weak and *superstious* notions, dishonour- XV.
able to God, and hurtful to solid virtue; 
by greatly increasng, and adding to the
probability of a future existence in gene-
ral, and giving particular assurances of a
happy *immortality*, which to reason is
obscure and doubtful at best, if at all pro-
bable. I shall only add, that by denying
there is any foundation in reason for the
belief of a future state, we take away,
from those who disown revelation, one
of the strongest motives to a virtuous
practice; which is, indeed, no direct
proof that the principle itself is *wrong*,
but may justly incline us to *suspect* it;
or, at least, should make us proceed with
deliberation and *caution*, before we ven-
ture to determine in a matter of so
great consequence, and not suffer us to
be *hasty* in forming a conclusion, that
may be dangerous to religion, and the
happiness of the world. To set this
matter in a clear and full light, I shall
do these two things.

I. Con-

SERM.

XV.

I. Consider what evidence *natural reason* affords of a future state. And;

II. Shew the great advantage we receive from *Christianity*, with respect to this important principle; by which it will appear, that notwithstanding the discoveries which reason may make, and the intimations we find of it in the writings of the *Old Testament*, it is reveal'd in a so much *plainer* and *stronger* manner, that it may, with great propriety, be said to be *brought to light through the Gospel*.

I. I am to consider what kind of evidences there are of a future state from *reason*. And, in general, we can pretend to nothing more than *probability*; and when this is all that the nature of the case will admit of, every thinking man will be determin'd by it in *religion* as well as in the *common affairs* of life; and it must be unreasonable, to the last degree to insist on *demonstration* and *strict certainty*. The next point to be settled is, what must pass for *probability*; which is the more

more necessary to be considered, because SERM.
 men's not fixing the true nature of it, XV.
 and blending proofs of a different kind,
 partly *probable* and partly *demonstrative*,
 even where *demonstration* can't justly be
 expected, seems to have occasion'd all the
 obscurity and confusion in their specula-
 tions on this subject.

The chief ground of all our arguings
 for a future state are the *moral* perfec-
 tions of God; and these are generally
 suppos'd to be *certain* principles, that rea-
 son can demonstrate. Now if this be
 allow'd, I am not at all oblig'd, when
 I am only forming a *probable* conclusion,
 to shew that any particular principle is
necessarily *inferred* from these perfections,
 because then it will not be barely *probable*,
 but *certainly true*; nor that the contrary
 is *absolutely inconsistent* with them, for if
 so, it will not be *probably*, but *certain-
 ly* false. All that I am concern'd to
 prove is, that what I maintain is *most*
agreeable to the ideas of the divine wisdom
 and goodness; and this must be allow'd
 to be *probable* evidence, tho' I can't re-
 duce the other opinion to a *direct* *absur-*

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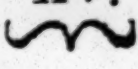
dity,

SERM. *duty*, or else *probability* will be the same
 XV. with *demonstration*. Again, in our reason-
 ings about probability, we must judge up-
 on what *appears* to us, and not suspend
 our belief because we don't know *all the*
circumstances of things, or *all the ends* that
 an infinitely perfect being may have in
 view. For *probabilities* subsist in their
 full force, and will influence the conduct
 of every wise and considerate man, not-
 withstanding *possibilities* to the contrary.
 And there must be allow'd to be a great
 probability in the argument before us,
 if the notion of a future state be shewn
 to be most agreeable to the *constitution* of
 man, to the *moral attributes* of God his
 supreme governour, and the *present con-*
dition and *circumstances* of human nature.
 This I shall briefly examine. And,

1st. If we consider the nature of man-
 kind, we shall find that they are *rea-*
sonable beings, capable of discerning
 the difference between good and evil,
 of understanding that particular law,
 whatever it be, by which they are to be
 govern'd, and the weight and import-
 ance of the several motives which urge
 to

from reason and revelation.

381

to the observation of it; that they are SERM.
likewise *voluntary* agents, who are nei- XV.
ther by their internal frame, nor by any 
foreign influence, necessarily determined
to virtue or vice; and consequently *moral*
and *accountable*, capable of being *govern'd*
by laws, and *rewarded* or *punish'd* for
their behaviour.

The next thing to be consider'd then
is, whether God, their supreme gover-
nor, has actually given them *a law*, by
which to direct and regulate their con-
duct. And, in general, it is highly pro-
bable that there must be some law of *in-*
telligent natures, as there are in the *ani-*
mal and *material* world: For doubtless
the great creator design'd them for some
end, as he did, evidently, the various
systems of insensible matter; otherwise,
the most perfect parts of the creation are
the most useless and insignificant. Now
no creature can answer an *end* but by
means adapted to it, which are the *law*
of its nature. So that some *peculiar laws*
are as necessary to be suppos'd for *rational*
self-determining beings, as the *laws of mo-*
tion in the *material* world: And the dif-

B b 2

ference

SERM. ference only lies here, that whereas matter is govern'd by *necessary* laws, and *necessarily* determin'd to its effects; rational and free beings are capable of directing their own conduct, either in *conformity*, or *opposition*, to the law of their nature; which (as I observ'd before) renders them *accountable* for their behaviour, and proper subjects of *reward* or *punishment*.

The general law which men are under is in short this, to do whatever is suitable to their *intelligent nature*, agreeable to the *relations* in which they are plac'd, and to their *rank* and *station* in the world, and what will best answer the *end* of their being, so far as it respects *themselves*, or *the whole community of mankind* of which they are members; and, consequently, to subject all the inferior appetites and passions to the conduct of reason, which is the *noblest* and most *perfect* principle, to do nothing but what *becomes* the *dignity* of their frame, nothing that will *dishonour* and *debase* it, to practise *reverence*, *love*, *submission*, and *gratitude* to God, and imitate his moral character by
the

from reason and revelation.

383

the exercise of *justice, meekness, peaceableness, universal benevolence, fidelity*, and all other *social* virtues, on which the order and happiness of the world depends : And this I call a law which God has given to mankind, because whatever appears to be *a rule*, arising from the establish'd constitution of things, with reference to the actions of the creature, can be no other than *a law* in the design of the creator. Let us now proceed to inquire in the

2^d place, Whether it be not most reasonable to suppose, that God, as the *wise* governour of mankind, will reward or punish their behaviour, in obeying or disobeying the law of their trial. And, in general, to imagine that he takes *no notice* of the conduct of his creatures, and is determin'd to make *no difference* at all between the virtuous and the vitious, represents him as having but little regard to the *order* and *harmony*, or even to the *happiness* of the rational world ; and seems very *unsuitable* to his wisdom and goodness, in the character both of their *father* and *governour* : And if he makes *any* difference, which all our notions of him

SERM. lead us to expect, the same reasons must
 XV. induce him to do it in *every* instance. For
 if it be not fit to reward virtue and punish vice in *particulars*, and consequently, proportionably, in *every particular*, it can hardly be a point of wisdom and goodness upon *the whole*. And from hence it undeniably follows, that no virtuous man can, upon the whole, have *less happiness* than one that is vitious; for in this case, virtue would, in effect, be *punish'd*, and vice *rewarded*.

But to give this argument its full strength, it may be proper briefly to state the *true foundation* of the divine rewards and punishments. The rewards, bestowed by the great Creator on his creatures, are not the result of any proper *merit* in them; nor his punishments the effect of *passion* in himself. Punishments I therefore suppose to have, chiefly, a *medicinal* design, in order to correct the disorders of mankind, and to have their foundation in the *wisdom* of the great governour of the world, because they are proper to check the growth of vice, and maintain the authority of the divine laws and government;

from reason and revelation.

385

ment; and rewards to be founded in his SERM.
wisdom and *infinite benevolence* towards his XV.
creatures, which inclines him to commu-
nicate happiness to all, who are *rightly*
dispos'd and qualify'd for it. The sum
of the argument then will stand thus.
The design of God, in all his dealings
with men, is to promote their *happiness*.
He has given them laws, the observation
of which has not only a *certain* tendency
to their happiness, but is *necessary* in or-
der to it. — It is therefore reasonable to
be suppos'd, that he will take the most
effectual methods to secure the *general*
purpose he has in view, which is the *good*
of his creatures. — This can't be ob-
tained without a *conformity* to the laws
which he has given them. — These laws
will not *probably* be obey'd, unless they
are inforc'd by the sanction of *suitable re-*
wards and *punishments*. — And there-
fore the wisdom of his government seems
to require that he should make use of
these, since they are the *most proper* means
to answer his end. So that *rewards* and
punishments appear to have the same rea-
son and foundation with *government itself*,

B b 4

viz.

SERM. viz. to prevent that *moral evil*, which all
 XV. good laws are design'd to restrain, and
 which is directly *opposite* to, and *incon-*
sistent with, the supreme happiness of
 mankind. To this let me add, that in
 order to serve these wise purposes, the
 rewards and punishments must be such,
 as, it may reasonably be expected, will
support virtue in the present imperfect and
 corrupt state of human nature, and *coun-*
terballance, in some proportion, the in-
 fluence of animal passions, and the weight
 of worldly temptations. The only point
 therefore that remains to be deter-
 min'd is,

3dly, Whether all this, which, it has
 been shewn, may justly be expected from
 the wise governour of the world, is actu-
 ally done *in the present life*. And the con-
 trary is in a manner self-evident, and scarce
 needs illustration. For not to mention
 what is obvious to the common sense of
 mankind, that there are, and have been
 in all ages, multitudes of *virtuous* persons,
 who have enjoy'd less happiness in this life
 than *the most vicious*, whose wickedness
 has not only depriv'd their own minds,
 but

from reason and revelation.

387

but been extremely injurious to the order SERM.
and peace of society (which if there be XV.
a foundation for the rewards and punish-
ments at all, as has been already prov'd,
ought not to happen in any one instance)
not to insist longer on this I say, if we
take the present state of the world as it is
upon *the whole*, it has not *one mark* of a
state of equal and impartial *retribution*,
but every thing that might fairly be ex-
pected in a state of *trial*.

For here good and evil are *indifferently*
dispens'd; and there is *one event* to the
just and the unjust, without any *particu-*
lar, or, at least, *frequent* interposition, to
vindicate the righteous man's cause, or
punish his wicked oppressor. Men of
distinguish'd vice are high in honour, and
possess the largest affluence of worldly
riches and grandeur, and attain it, often-
times, by *treachery*, *oppression*, *perjury*, and
other *base* and *unrighteous* methods; while
persons of *singular* and *unblemish'd* virtue
are loaded with a heavy weight of cares,
and abandon'd to poverty and contempt.
Nay they are sometimes despis'd, robb'd of
the esteem of their fellow creatures, de-
priv'd

SERM. priv'd of the necessaries and conveniencies
 XV. of life, abus'd and persecuted, even for
 ~~~~~ their *goodness*.—And do these righteous  
 men seem to have receiv'd their *re-*  
*ward*?—That reward which is re-  
 serv'd for them by a God of *infinite bene-*  
*volence* and *mercy*.—Or that reward,  
 which the *allwise* governour of the world  
 is determin'd to confer, for the *encourage-*  
*ment* and *support* of virtue?—On the  
 contrary, can we suppose the affluence of  
 prosperity, the height of honour, the ease  
 and plenty which the wicked enjoy,  
 are design'd as *penal evils*, to deter others  
 from the practice of vice?—Can that be  
 call'd a state of *reward* for virtuous men,  
 which they groan under as an incum-  
 brance, and from which they earnestly  
 desire to be enlarg'd into a more free and  
 active life?—Or can it be deem'd a  
*proper punishment* for those, who have no  
 notion of happiness above it, and there-  
 fore center all their hopes and desires in  
 it?

If it be said, that there is a sufficient  
 distinction made between good and bad  
 men, by the *natural good and evil conse-*  
*quences*



*from reason and revelation.*

389

quences of virtue and vice : I answer, that, SERM.  
XV.  
in innumerable cases, these natural consequences are *obstructed*, or *evaded*, and in these there is properly *no reward or punishment at all* : In others they are far from being *equivalent* to the outward advantages the sinner enjoys, or the accidental disadvantages the good man labours under ; and in all such instances, *virtue* may upon the whole be said to *suffer*, and *wickedness* to be *triumphant*. And considering in how great a degree, the difference that there really is between good and bad men, with respect to happiness and misery, springs from *the belief of a future state* ; how frequently it happens, that there is no reward or punishment *seen*, much less a *full and equal* retribution ; and that the *natural good and evil consequences* of virtue and vice are neither so *remarkable* in themselves, nor so *universal*, nor so *certain*, as, it may reasonably be expected, will *support* a *steady* inflexible integrity under discouragement and oppression, and *counterballance* the strong allurements of worldly honour and pleasure ; upon all these accounts

SERM. counts, I say, we must either conclude,

XV. that there will be a state of more *impartial* retribution hereafter, or else, which I have shewn to be highly improbable, that God does not concern himself to make *any* difference between the righteous and the wicked, or at least not so *universally* or in such a *degree*, as to promote the grand design of rewards and punishments, maintaining and enforcing the practice of virtue, and giving a check to corruption and *moral* disorder \*.

We may add, to strengthen the *probability* of a future state from the *wisdom*

\* I know but of one thing more, that can invalidate any part of the argument contain'd in this discourse, and that is, that 'tis *unnecessary* to assert a state of rewards for good men after death, because if we allow the future punishment of the wicked, that *alone* will make a *sufficient distinction* between them, and answer all the ends of the divine government.—But to this scheme there seems to be an *insuperable* objection, *viz.* that it supposes the *several* degrees of virtue to be *equally* rewarded, or rather *none* of them rewarded; nay, that those which are most *difficult*, attended with the *fewest* pleasures, and the *greatest* inconveniences, and are, withal, of *extraordinary* service to mankind, receive the *least* reward, *i. e.* in truth, are *discourag'd*, instead of being distinguish'd and honour'd. And whether it be possible to reconcile this to the ideas of *supreme wisdom and goodness*, or indeed to the *common principles of equity*, I leave to the judgment of all impartial inquirers.

and

*from reason and revelation.*

391

and *goodness* of God our supreme gover-  
nour, the *moral* and *accountable* nature of  
man, the *confusion* and *disorder* and *promiscuous* distribution of good and evil in  
the present life, that it agrees, vastly better than the contrary supposition, with  
our general idea of the *excellency* of human nature, and the *greatness* and *extent*  
of its faculties. For upon taking an impartial survey of human life, under  
its present embarrassments and difficulties, can we really imagine that it is  
the *whole* of our being, the *only* state we are designed for? Can we reconcile our  
minds to the thought, that man, who is indu'd with such *noble* powers, and capable  
of such *vast* improvements, was intended by the great Creator to be confined  
to this *narrow* and *imperfect* scene of action? Does it seem agreeable to our  
notions of the infinite goodness of the Deity, to suppose that he was made for  
no *higher end*, than to struggle and labour, for a short space, under the inconveni-  
encies and miseries of this uncertain and troublesome world, and then to lose his  
existence? On the contrary, is he not, considered in this view, one of the most

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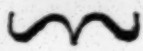


SERM. *unaccountable* parts of the creation ; form'd  
 XV. with larger expectations and prospects than  
 ~~~~~ other animals are capable of, only to *dis-*  
quiet and *torment* him ? Does he appear
 with that *honour* which is suitable to his
 character, as a being possess'd of such *super-*
rior qualities, and made after the *image of*
God ? No : but as an *insignificant diminutive*
creature, of very little consequence in
 the universe ; a *mystery* in the course of
 providence, that it will ever confound and
 puzzle his reason to explain. Whereas, if
 we suppose that there is a state of much
 higher perfection, for which human na-
 ture is design'd, it will appear like itself,
 truly *great* and *excellent*. And if from the
nature of things we may, as doubtless we
 may with *some* probability, guess at the *ori-*
ginal scheme of the Creator in forming
 them ; the *active* and *improveable* nature of
 the mind of man, which is so cramp'd and
 limited in its operations in the *present* state,
 speaks it to be intended for *another life*,
 where its faculties will be enlarged ; and
 it will be employ'd in such exercises, and
 enjoy such pleasures, as are suited to its *im-*
portance and *dignity*. Having laid be-
 fore you, briefly, some of the *natural*
 evidences

from reason and revelation.

393

evidences of a future state : I proceed to SERM.
shew, XV.

2dly, The advantages we receive from 
Christianity, with respect to this important
principle ; by which it will appear, that
notwithstanding the discoveries *reason* may
make, and the intimations we find of it in
the writings of the *Old Testament*, it is
reveal'd in a so much *plainer* and *stronger*
manner, that it may, with a great pro-
priety, be said to be *brought to light thro'*
the gospel. Suffer me just to premise, that
the assurances, which the Christian reli-
gion gives of a future life, are a strong
presumption that our *natural reasonings*
about it are *just* and *conclusive*. For as it
appears in fact, that God is determined to
dispense the rewards and punishments of
virtue and vice hereafter, we may be as-
sured, that this is *most agreeable* to the
wisdom, goodness, and justice of his go-
vernment ; and consequently all our argu-
ments for it, from his absolute perfec-
tion, and the consideration of him as the
wise and righteous governour of mankind,
from the powers of human nature, and
the present scene of things, are hereby

cor-

SERM. corroborated and confirm'd; and shewn not
 XV. to be the wild suggestions of *fancy* and
 ~~~~~ *enthusiasm*, but the sober dictates of *right*  
*reason*. However the advantages we re-  
 ceive by Christianity are still very *conside-*  
*rable*, and prove it in this respect, as well  
 as others, to be of the greatest use and  
 benefit to mankind. For

1<sup>st</sup>, By the Christian revelation we have  
 a much stronger probability of *a future*  
*state in general*, than we could have by  
 mere unassisted reason. The *natural pro-*  
*bability* is exactly the same, as it would  
 have been if there had been no revelation;  
 and with this is join'd *another proof* of a  
*different* kind, as *strong* as the evidence  
 we have for the truth of Christianity:  
 These two proofs are not at all *inconsistent*;  
 but the latter removes all the *uncertainty*  
 that might attend the former, and greatly  
 increases the evidence upon *the whole*; like  
 two credible testimonies to the same fact,  
 which *mutually* strengthen and confirm  
 each other. The testimony of *one* honest  
 and capable witness, to the truth of a  
 thing that fell within his own observation,  
 may be thought *sufficient*; but the addi-  
 tion



*from reason and revelation.*

395

tion of *one* or *more* witnesses, of equal ca-  
pacity and integrity, must render the pro-  
bability more *full* and *unexceptionable*.

SER M.  
XV.  
~

Again, Christianity assures us of the *resurrection* of the body, (divested of all gross and animal principles, and in a state of glory and incorruption) to be a means of pleasure and happiness to the mind, which is a point that *reason* was absolutely in the dark about; and has given us *an instance in kind*, a glorious and uncontestable *specimen* of a resurrection and future life, in the resurrection of Christ. Then it not only establishes the *general notion* of a future existence, but asserts, in the strongest terms the soul's *immortality* and an *eternal* reward for the righteous, concerning which, tho' of the utmost consequence to the comfort of mens minds, and the cause of virtue, the dictates of reason are at best *imperfect* and *confus'd*. And tho' the *Jews* were favoured with a revelation from heaven, and therefore among them, one might justly expect clearer and fuller discoveries of *eternal life*; yet notwithstanding this, the law of *Moses* has nothing in it of this kind, but is in-

C c

forced

SER M. forced only by general assurances of the  
 XV. divine favour, and promises of *temporal*  
 ~~~~~ rewards; and there are very *sparing* intimations of a future *immortality*, even in the writings of the Prophets.

Add to all this, that the reward, which the Gospel proposes, is of the *noblest* kind, honourable to God, and worthy the excellent powers and capacities of human nature: It consists, under the continual influence of the divine presence and favour, in the perfection of *reason* and *purity*; is *an inheritance undefiled*, into which nothing of vice or misery shall enter; a state where *charity never faileth*, and, consequently, of eternal harmony and peace, and the most exalted social happiness; in which the *whole* human nature shall shine in its highest lustre and dignity, the spiritual part being compleatly *refin'd*, and fitted for the *sublimest* employments and pleasures, and the body so *adapted* to it, that instead of *cramping* the rational life, it shall rather *assist* its most enlarged operations.

I shall conclude all with this single remark, that if there are any here present,

fent, who are prejudic'd againſt the *Chriſtian revelation*, on account of the clear discoveries it makes of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, they muſt be convinc'd, that they can reap but little advantage by rejecting *Chriſtianity*, becauſe the thing in general, how terrible ſoever it may appear, is a principle *the light of reaſon* dictates. Let it be allow'd, that the evidence for it amounts to no more than a good degree of *probability*, it ought however to determine the practice of every rational man.—For what but *probability* is the chief ſpring of human actions? — Do not *credible* testimony, probable opinions and proſpects, nay frequently *ſuſpicious* and *remote* conſequences and conjectures, influence all the affairs of the world; and direct mens conduct in caſes of the laſt importance to *themſelves*, their *families*, and *civil ſociety*? — It ought therefore undoubtedly to decide in matters of religion, which is the moſt momentous of all our intereſts: And a man, in the opinion of every impartial ſpectator, would behave to the higheſt pitch of extravagance,

SERM. who should act *against* probability, as he
 XV. must do if he is not *determin'd* by it,
 when an eternity of happiness is depend-
 ing. So that he who gives himself up to
 the gratification of irregular appetites,
 and a course of vice and impurity, can
 never be secure, even tho' he destroys the
 authority of the *Christian revelation*, un-
 less he can also extinguish his *reason*,
 erase out of his mind all notions of a
Deity and a *Providence*, and, consequently,
 subvert the principles of *natural religion*
 likewise.

I have argu'd only upon the *supposition*
 that there are such persons, because to
 take it for *granted* that there are really
 any who are acted by this vile principle,
 and have such a degenerate and mon-
 strous turn of mind, would be the greatest
affront I could offer to this audience.
 For to say that a man is *prejudic'd* a-
 gainst what is the truest exaltation and
 happiness of his nature, is, in effect, to
 assert, that all remains of reason, all wise
 and good impressions, are totally lost and
 obliterated in him. He that can wish
 to die like a *brute*, can't have the *spirit* of

a man; and there is no *baseness*, no *vil-* SERM. XV.
lains, but we may justly suppose him ca-
 pable of. Besides, what do his notions
tend to? — Do they raise the *value* of
 human nature, or improve its *happiness*?
 — Do they contribute to the regularity
 and order of *private life*, or the peace
 and welfare of *society*? — Will they
 make him at all more *useful* in the
 world, a more *faithful* friend, *tender*
 husband, *affectionate* and *careful* father,
 or more *industrious* and *honest* in his busi-
 ness? Quite the reverse of all this. —
 They *degrade* and *vilify* human nature;
 — raise none but *gloomy* and *horrid* ideas
 in a considerate mind; — and lead to
licentiousness and *disorder*. Let us there-
 fore thankfully cherish the glorious hopes,
 which the gospel affords, of *an immortal*
existence, in which we shall enjoy the per-
 fection of honour and happiness. Let us
 look on this state only as *preparatory* to
 our future more sublime and blissful life;
 and train ourselves up for it by cultiva-
 ting our reason, and the practice of uni-
 versal righteousness and virtue. I shall
 leave with you, to this purpose, the words

400 *The evidence of a future state, &c.*

SERM. of St. John, Beloved, now are we the sons

XV. of God, and it doth not yet appear what

¹ John iii. we shall be : But we know, that when he

² shall appear, we shall be like him ; for

we shall see him as he is. And every man

who hath this hope in him, purifieth him-

self, even as he is pure.



S E R M O N



SERMON XVI.

The nature, folly, and danger of
scoffing at religion.

2 PET. iii. 3.

*Knowing this first, that there shall
come in the last days scoffers,
walking after their own lusts.*



Discourse on this subject can SERM.
need no apology with any one XVI.
that knows the world, and
has observed what open at-
tempts have been made (and conducted
sometimes with a great deal of art and
subtilty) not only to disgrace and under-
mine *revelation*, but *natural religion* itself;

SERM. and propagate such *base, unworthy*, and
 XVI. *groveling* sentiments of human nature, as
 have a direct tendency to root out of
 mens minds every principle of honour
 and ingenuity, and destroy the very foun-
 dation of all good morals. Some there
 are, even among our selves, who endea-
 vour to *palliate* and *soften* the vilest enor-
 mities, resolve the whole obligation of
 morality into *political contrivance*, and,
 with the scoffers mention'd by St. *Peter*,
 deride the *future judgment* of mankind,
 a state of rewards and punishments after
 death, as an *idle, romantic, visionary* scene,
 invented for the greater security of civil
 government, and supported by enthu-
 siasm; and thus would fain banter us
 out of the two highest privileges of our
 reasonable nature, our *virtue*, and our *im-*
mortality. I speak not these things for
 the sake of declaiming on the *looseuess* and
degeneracy of the times, or with a view
 to represent the *present* as more corrupt
 than *former* ages, in almost all of which,
 there have been some profess'd advocates
 for vice and licentiousness; but only to
 shew how necessary it is, that we should
 each

each of us, in our several stations, en-SERM.
deavour to put a stop to the *progress* of XVI.
this evil, which seems rather to be pre-
vailing than losing ground amongst us,
and has been long complain'd of by all
those, who have had a just concern for
the honour of human nature, and the
happiness of the world. To contribute
my part towards it, and not to give *hard*
names, or raise an abhorrence of any *par-*
ticular characters, farther than it is neces-
sary to serve the cause of truth, was my
sincere intention in composing this dis-
course: In which I shall

I. Consider the nature, folly, and dan-
ger of the crime mentioned in the
text.

II. Inquire into the causes of it. And,

III. Conclude with some suitable re-
flections.

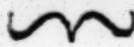
I. I am to consider the nature, folly,
and danger of the crime mentioned in my
text, *scoffing at religion*, than which no-
thing can be more offensive and shock-
ing to a considerate mind. It must in-
deed

SER M. deed be own'd, that religion has had the
 XVI. misfortune to be monstrously *perverted*
 and *misrepresented*, and that the most absurd and incredible doctrines, the wildest enthusiasm, and even such principles and practices as strike at the root of all morality, have been urg'd and impos'd under that *sacred* and *venerable* name. And undoubtedly it must be a laudable design, and of great service to mankind, to expose these gross corruptions, by which the *native* excellency and beauty of religion is quite defac'd, and its usefulness intirely destroy'd. However, even establish'd and popular superstitions are not to be treated with *rudeness* and *scur-rility*, but *calmly argued* against. For there is a decent respect due to the *religion* of a country, as well as to its *laws* and *manners*; and he, who instead of *reasoning* against particular errors, takes upon him to *revile*, and treat in a *ludicrous* way, what all round him have the highest value for, shews himself to be an absolute stranger to the common rules of civility, ——— and ought, to be *despis'd* for his *insolence*. Besides,
religious

religious prejudices are, of all others, the SERM. most stubborn and inveterate; and, there- XVI. fore, whoever attempts to reform them, if he knows any thing of human nature, will proceed with *discretion* and *gentleness*; and not in a *harsh, insulting* method, which must naturally irritate and inflame the passions, and render the prejudices of those whom he opposes yet more incurable. And all judicious inquirers will make a difference between religion as it is *in itself*, and as it has suffer'd by *accidental abuses*: For the former may, in every part of it, be rational, and highly beneficial, tho' the latter should be allow'd to be absurd, unnatural, and hurtful; and, by necessary consequence, it may be an argument of a discerning mind, and both an honourable and useful undertaking, to endeavour to put a stop to the growth of *enthusiasm* and *superstition*, but unworthy a man, or a good member of society, to banter *religion*.

I am inclin'd to treat such scoffers *decently*, and shall therefore suppose them capable of sober reflection: And taking this for granted, I would desire them to

ask

SERM. ask themselves impartially, whether there
XVI. be any thing in true religion that is *really*
 ridiculous? To begin with the grand principles of natural religion. Is there any thing *ridiculous* in the belief of a Deity, a supreme, infinite, and intelligent mind, the creator and governor of the universe? Or is it more agreeable to *reason* to suppose, that the whole system of the world, which appears in fact to be subject to innumerable variations, is eternal and necessarily existent? Or that the regular, beautiful, and useful frame of nature, in every part of which there is display'd the most surprizing and curious workmanship, was jumbled together by chance, and not form'd by a wise cause? Is it *absurd* to assert, that he who made the world exercises an universal providence, and directs all the affairs of it; or that the first cause of all things is absolutely perfect, and, in a particular manner, the governor of the rational and moral creation, to whom he has given laws, and whom he has made by nature accountable? And upon allowing his absolute perfection and government of the world,
what

what is there *ludicrous* in any of the du-
ties of piety, in a supreme reverence and
love of him, and humble submission to
the wisdom and authority of his provi-
dence, in celebrating his glorious excel-
lencies, adoring his goodness, and ac-
knowledging our constant dependance up-
on him? What is there that has a *ridi-
culous aspect*, or can excite any but *the
laughter of fools*, in justice, temperance,
probity, universal benevolence; in a strict
inflexible integrity, and a disinterested,
generous concern for the public wel-
fare? And if in all these most essential
principles and duties of religion there be
nothing *wild* and *extravagant*, nothing
weak and *trifling*, nothing, on the con-
trary, but what is truly *venerable*, *sub-
lime* and *useful*, he that endeavours to
make a jest of them must render him-
self *contemptible*; and gives certain proof
either of the *weakness* of his understand-
ing, or of the *depravity* and *wickedness* of
his heart.

Again, is it at all *unsuitable* to our most
worthy and honourable notions of God
to believe, that when the world was uni-
versally

SERM.
XVI.
~

SERM. universally corrupted, and overrun with ig-

XVI. norance, superstition, and vice, and both
 the knowledge and practice of the religion of nature were, in a great measure, lost, he would graciously interpose for the good of his creatures, and teach them their duty by an *extraordinary* revelation? Or to assert, that the person, who was commission'd to accomplish this most desirable end, wrought miracles to prove his authority, engage the *attention* of mankind, and counterballance their *prejudices*? Is it in the least *irrational* to suppose, that this revelation has fix'd, with the utmost distinctness, the terms of our acceptance with God, and thereby remov'd *distracting* suspicions, and *superstitious* terrors; and promis'd a *greater* reward, even an *eternity* of happiness, a *greater* reward, I say, for the encouragement of virtue, than could be expected, with any good degree of probability, on the principles of natural reason? Or finally, that besides *the law of nature reviv'd*, it would enjoin two or three *positive* duties (guarding, in the strictest manner possible against all *weak* and
dangerous

dangerous abuses of them) which are evidently calculated to enforce the eternal rules of morality, and a most exact and scrupulous regard to every branch of substantial and useful virtue? SERM. XVI.

It is possible, indeed, by an *unfair representation* to make any thing appear ridiculous, be it ever so rational in itself, or of ever so much importance to the happiness of mankind. The putting *false colours* upon it, nay only the giving it an *odd name*, will have this effect with the thoughtless and inconsiderate part of the world. Thus rigid justice may be call'd *singularity* and *preciseness*; — acts of disinterested benevolence and generosity *romantic heroism*; — and the love of God *enthusiasm*. In like manner the being *immers'd* in water, or eating bread, or drinking wine, — if it be describ'd as an essential part of religion in itself, without a reference to its moral use, — or as a charm, of I know not what mysterious and incomprehensible efficacy, — or as an attonement for an immoral conduct, — may well be reputed *weak* and *childish*. But when the *abuse* is discovered upon an impartial examination,

SERM. amination, and it is clearly seen, that the
 XVI. ridiculer has only diverted himself and
 others with his own *ignorance* or *wilful*
misconstruction; wise and sober men must
 think very meanly of such a practice,
 and be surpriz'd to find it prevail in any
 companies, that have a concern for their
 own *honour*, and profess a regard, I need
 not say to *truth* and *virtue*, but to *com-*
mon sense and *decency*.

Further, the grand principles and du-
 ties of religion are so far from having
 any thing *ridiculous* in them, that they
 are some of the *plainest* and most *obvious*
 dictates of reason, and there are no truths
 that, when justly represented, sooner ap-
 prove themselves to the unprejudiced
 judgment of mankind; which renders
 the *guilt* of the scoffer much more aggra-
 vated, and his *impertinence* and *folly* more
 insupportable. This is notorious with
 respect to the being and providence of
 God, and the intrinsic excellency and
 immutable authority of the rules of vir-
 tue, which no one can bring himself in
 earnest to oppose, without offering great
 violence to the reason of his mind. And

as

as to *Christianity* in particular, since it is S E R M. XVI. the noblest improvement of morality and natural religion, and *so far* recommends itself; since all its *peculiar* doctrines are consistent and credible; since the author of this most rational and beneficial scheme was a perfect pattern of *innocence*, open, generous, and humble, free from every appearance of *ambition* and *craft*, and gave the most convincing proofs of his being sent from God, by numerous and unquestionable miracles; *real* miracles, above the *known* powers of nature or art, nay, probably, above any powers communicated or allow'd to *created* agents; miracles *publicly* perform'd, and on *vast multitudes* at once, and on *sudden emergencies*, where there could be no suspicion of a concerted fraud; and, generally, most *useful* miracles, which were not mere ostentations of the superiour power and wisdom, but demonstrated likewise the goodness of their author; upon these accounts, I say, it may justly be asserted, with respect to the *Christian revelation* in particular, that it deserves the approbation of impartial inquirers, or at least to be oppos'd with *modesty* and *respect*; and

SERM. that to decide against it *confidently*, and
 XVI. treat it with *rudeness* and *contempt*, notwithstanding all these plausible circumstances, and strong presumptions of its truth and divinity, is *weakness* and *insolence*.

Let me only add, that religion is of the utmost consequence to the comfort of mens minds, the peace of society, and the general good of the world. What, for instance, can be a more *pleasing* reflection, than to consider ourselves, and the whole universe, as under the conduct of a being of unerring wisdom, inflexible justice, and unlimited goodness? On the contrary, if we discard the notion of a Deity and a Providence, we can have none but *dark* and *gloomy* prospects; our happiness or misery being to be determined either by a *blind, random chance*, or by *fix'd and irrevocable fate*? Again, what can be more *honourable* to human nature, than the notion of a future immortal existence, in which our rational faculties will be refin'd and enlarg'd; or what stronger motive to the practice of virtue, which has a necessary and inseparable connexion both with
private

private and *social* happiness; or more SERM.
powerful dissuasive from vice, which XVI.
tends to the corruption and misery of
individuals, and the dissolution and ruin
of *public communities*? And if we sup-
pose that the distinction between virtue and
vice is only imaginary, and has no foun-
dation in reason and nature; has not this
a most direct tendency to introduce *all*
manner of confusion? Upon this scheme
societies would be so far from being *happy*,
that they could *scarce subsist*: For if the
exercise of the social virtues was regarded
as a mere matter of *private convenience*,
the greatest *strength* and *security* of civil
government would be destroy'd: So that
whoever sets himself to vilify these impor-
tant truths, and represent them in a ridi-
culous light, not only fixes certain *reproach*
and *infamy* upon himself, by *misplacing*
his ridicule on what has really nothing
absurd in it; he not only shews himself
to be a *slight* and *careless* observer, that
never examin'd to the bottom of things;
but is, in fact, whatever his intention
may be, whether to gratify a *trifling* hu-
mour, display the *forwardness* of his ge-

SERM. nius, or corrupt the *morals* of the age, an
 XVI. enemy to *society* and the *general happiness*
 of mankind *.

And as the *guilt* of these scoffers is very great, their *danger* is in proportion. For if the principles of religion should happen to be *true* (and the *vainest* and most *confident* unbeliever won't, surely, pretend to prove that this is *impossible*) he that has so *monstrously* abus'd his reason, that noblest gift of God, as to imploy it against his maker, and all that is amiable and useful in human life, must expect to be treated with the utmost *rigour* and *severity*. Having consider'd, thus largely, the nature, folly, and danger of *scoffing* at religion: I proceed to the

* I would not be understood, by this, to insinuate, that even such persons ought to be punish'd by the civil power. On the contrary, as *these enemies* may be entirely defeated by *reason*, and the mischief they are capable of doing prevented, 'tis my firm belief that *forcible methods* are altogether *unnecessary*, and must, of consequence, be extremely *dangerous*. For the allowing the magistrate to interpose in matters of *opinion*, where there is no *direct* violation of the peace of the society, only for fear of *remote* and *possible* consequences (of which he must be the sole and absolute Judge) will lay a foundation for all manner of *violence* and *persecution*.

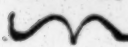
2^d Thing propos'd, which was to in-^{SERM.}
quire into the causes of it. These causes ^{XVI.}
are *various*.

It sometimes springs from a *levity* of mind, which disposes men to treat all subjects *ludicrously*. Instances of this kind must have fallen, more or less, under every one's observation; I mean of persons, who are incapable of *cool* and *sedate* reflection, and so fond of *a jest*, that they can't help giving way to it on the most *solemn* occasions. They are profess'd enemies to all that is grave and manly, and therefore treat *religion*, as well as their *friends*, and those to whom they are under the highest obligations, with the utmost *freedom* and *impertinence*.

Again, bantering religion frequently proceeds from *ignorance* and *superficial inquiry*. 'Tis an excellent remark of a most ingenious author, that "a little
" philosophy disposes mens minds to *A-*
" *theism*." * Because they understand not the works of nature, their admirable composition, and various uses, they grow

* Lord Bacon.

SERM. *profane and sceptical*; and are apt to urge

XVI.  their own *mistakes*, arising from the shallowness and confusion of their understandings, as so many *defects* and *blemishes* in the constitution of the universe: They have just sense enough to *cavil*, but not to *discern* and *display* the glories of the creation, and the amazing wisdom and goodness of the creator. And it is for want of a right knowledge of *human nature*, and of the *fitness* and *beauty* of actions and characters, that so many attempts have been made to confound virtue and vice, and destroy the obligations of morality.

But this cause of scoffing is most notorious with respect to *reveal'd* religion. The *inconsistencies* of party-schemes, the *dreams* of bewilder'd enthusiasts, the *innovations* and *corruptions* of weak, superstitious, and designing men, are blended with the *original* doctrines of Christianity, in order to render it ridiculous. The *frauds*, *impositions*, and *persecutions* of dishonest, proud, tyrannical priests are objected to the very religion that *condemns* them; which, upon this account, is all represented as the effect of *priestcraft*, combin'd

bin'd with the cunning of *statesmen* and *politicians*, with a view to inflave and impoverish the rest of mankind. Consult the writings of the enemies of Christianity, or join in their conversations, and you will find, that the *sbrewdest*, most *popular*, and constant invectives turn upon such topics as these; which evidently proves that they are not always very *exact* and *careful* in their religious inquiries, that they proceed on *false* principles, and censure what they have no *just idea* of, and are not quite free even from that *prejudice* and *implicit faith*, which they loudly disclaim for themselves, but are so forward to charge upon others.

Sometimes again, it happens, that the *fashion* of the age they live in, or the *general humour* of the company they frequent, makes persons set up for *scoffers*. To give themselves a *genteel* air, and acquire a character for *politeness*, they are induc'd to deride all religion, if the genius of their company be so *bold* and *unconfin'd*, or if it be more *moderate*, only revelation. At other times the same effect may be ascrib'd to *vanity*. Men are desirous to di-

SERM. *stinguish* their names; or fond of displaying their *wit*, and talent at *ridicule*.

XVI.

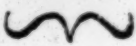
Whereas, in truth, there is no *wit* at all in *misrepresenting* things, but rather a strong presumption of *ignorance* and *stupidity*; and when any proceed so far, as to make a jest of God and his providence, to plead for the privilege of dying like brutes, and banter the obligations of virtue, which are a law to all intelligent beings, such a conduct is a certain proof, that reason is, in a great measure, *extinguish'd*, and the mind lost to all *good* and *generous* impressions.

But this leads me to observe, in the last place, that scoffing at religion may, in some persons, proceed from a *direct hatred* of it, occasioned by a prejudice in favour of their vices. This was the case of the *scoffers* mentioned in the text, who are expressly describ'd as *walking after their own lusts*. To this likewise, our Saviour imputed the ill treatment he met with, from the principal men of the *Jewish* nation. I shall not pretend to determine, that it is, *always*, the cause of infidelity in the present age; because I make no doubt
but

but mens judgments may be *unhappily* per-SERM. verted, even in points of great impor- XVI. tance, where there is, in general, an *honest* temper and habit of mind. This however I may safely venture to assert, that vice and immorality in the practice is the source of the *stoutest* and most *invincible* prejudices against religion; and that there is an *immediate connexion* between a wicked irregular life and *hating* the truth, nay, *opposing* the truth with the utmost *bitterness* and *virulence*. Suffer me to pursue this observation a little, which is of great consequence in *morals*, and will serve very much to illustrate the subject before us.

How natural is it for those, who live *as without God in the world*, to wish that there was no such being, that by destroying the first principle of all religion, they may justify the want of it in their practice: Or if the proofs of his existence are so evident and uncontestable, as not to be disputed, much less suppress'd, the next thing they are inclined to believe is, that there is no *providence*; and if they can satisfy themselves in this point, they get
rid

SERM. rid of the troublesome notion of an in-
 XVI. *spectator* and *judge* of their actions, and are
 left to follow, *freely*, the bent of their
 licentious inclinations. A principal part
 of God's providential government, if
 there be any such thing, is the govern-
 ment of *moral agents*, which, as it sup-
 poses that they are under a *law*, supposes
 likewise that they are *accountable* beings,
 and will be *rewarded*, or *punish'd*, accord-
 ing to their obedience, or disobedience to
 that law; and this future state of *retri-
 bution*, we may reasonably imagine, wick-
 ed men can't bear the thought of, because
 it fills the mind with confusion and ter-
 ror, and spoils the relish of their sensual
 enjoyments; and, of consequence, they
 must be enemies to the notion of God's
governing providence, from whence it is so
 directly inferr'd. And farther, when
 persons act as if there was no eternal law
 or rule of *right*, making their irregular
 appetites the sole guide and measure of
 their conduct, they are *unavoidably de-
 termin'd to wish* that virtue and vice were
 but *empty* names, the invention of the
crafty and *politic* to keep the world in
 sub-

subjection, and impose on their ignorance SERM.
 and credulity; and that the distinction XVI.
 between moral good and evil was merely 
arbitrary, and did not spring from the
 immutable *reason* of things. So that a
 wicked life has a manifest tendency to
 beget a *dislike* of the great principles of
natural religion, and inclines the mind to
question their truth and authority. But
 because *Christianity* has fully establish'd
 the notion of a providence, and most
 clearly explain'd, confirm'd, and improv'd
 moral obligations, and declar'd the cer-
 tainty of future rewards and punishments;
 and as these things stand in this divine
 revelation, they are not so liable to be
disputed and *perplex'd* as mere natural
 reasonings; it is no wonder if persons of
 corrupt dispositions and ungovern'd ap-
 petites take *particular* offence at *that*,
 since so long as the truth of our holy re-
 ligion is unquestion'd, they can enjoy no
peace or *security* in their vices.

I shall only add, that when men are
averse to the principles of religion, they
 will naturally *decline* all farther enquiries
 into the reasonableness of them, and be
fond

SERM. *fond* of every thing that looks *plausible*

XVI. on the side of infidelity. And the objections they have gathered together against religion, will soon appear to the view of their passions and prejudices, which give an *unnatural* turn to all objects, and never represent them in their just *proportion*, very *great* and *considerable*: On the contrary, the arguments for it will lose all their *force*, and be esteem'd *weak* and *trifling*. Till, at length, by this monstrous way of *imagining*, instead of *reasoning*, they work themselves into a fix'd persuasion, that there is nothing at all in religion; and acquire *an habit of thinking* somewhat like a *principle*, that there is not in nature any solid foundation of virtue. And when they have thus conquer'd their *scruples*, or rather silenc'd the voice of natural conscience, suppress'd their sense of the difference of good and evil, and *perverted* their reason, to render it *subservient* and *compliant* to their passions, they are easily led on to make *violent* and *spiteful* attacks upon religion, and use their utmost cunning and sophistry to undermine it. This is the
deplorable

deplorable but too *evident* connexion between vicious habits and opposing the truth ; till it settles, at last, in *rancour* and *malice* against it. SERM. XVI.

What has been said, in the foregoing discourse, suggests several useful reflections. We learn from it,

1st. Into what *extreme corruption* the mind of man, which is indu'd with such noble faculties, and form'd for Godlike perfection, is capable of being sunk, even to mistake *confusion* for *order*, and *deformity* for *beauty* ; to have its reason imploy'd as an *advocate* for *vice*, to paint it in *agreeable* colours, and set off the *shame* and *misery* of human nature with false and delusive charms ; and in vilifying *religion*, and representing it as *ridiculous* and *unnatural* ; *religion*, which is our chief honour and dignity, the only source of inward satisfaction, and the basis and support of social happiness, and which affords such ravishing prospects with respect to another life, as must make the most admir'd and envied scenes of worldly glory, pleasure, and luxury, appear mean and despicable.

Again,

SERM. Again, that we may not be impos'd on
 XVI. by the scoffers of our own times, let us
 always take care to distinguish between
reasoning and *ridicule*. There may indeed be reason in *ridicule*, but I believe it will generally be found, that there is a greater proportion of *falsehood* and *misrepresentation*. When therefore we are attack'd this way, as there is just ground for *suspicion*, we should examine nicely what it is that is *really* ridiculous; whether it be religion itself, or something of a different nature substituted in the place of it: The latter of these we may be satisfy'd will appear to be the case; for religion can't suffer by being *scrutiniz'd* any way, tho' our judgment concerning it may be debauch'd and corrupted. Of this indeed there will be but little danger, while we follow the method above recommended; otherwise, we may be banter'd out of our *senses*, and have no security against the most *dangerous delusions*.

Finally, that we may keep at the utmost distance from the crime mention'd in the text, let us imploy our reason in *defending* religion, and representing it in

a just and *amiable* light. Let our *natural* SERM.
abilities be devoted to this service, and all XVI.
our *studies* and *improvements* made sub-
servient to it. For the understanding and
wit of man can't be more *suitably* or
honourably exercis'd, than in describing
virtue in its proper beauty and lustre, and
stripping vice of those artificial orna-
ments, which hide its natural horror
and infamy; than in recommending jus-
tice, truth, and benevolence, and exposing
the mischiefs of ungovern'd passions; than
in tracing the footsteps of God's stupen-
dous wisdom and unbounded goodness in
the works of creation, the conduct of
providence, and the wonderful scheme of
our redemption. These are such *refin'd*
and *exalted* speculations, as must always
be our *noblest* entertainment, while we
continue possess'd of rational faculties.
By pursuing this design we act in *con-*
cert with the infinite wisdom of God,
and the reason of all good spirits above
us; do the *best offices* we are capable of
to mankind; and for improving, in so
worthy a manner, that *great* talent,
which.

426. *The nature, folly, and danger, &c.*

SERM. which is the most *distinguishing* excellency of our nature, shall receive peculiar marks of approbation and esteem from the supreme and almighty being, who is the *lover* and *rewarder* of virtue. To him be glory for ever. *Amen.*

F I N I S.



